

Notes from the Temporary City: Hackney Wick and Fish Island 2014-2015

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Hackney Wick and Fish Island, 2014–2015





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## About the authors

**Mara Ferreri is an urban researcher interested in the potential of temporary art/activist practices in spaces of contested urban transformation. After an MA in Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmiths College, in 2013 she was awarded a PhD in the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London. As a postdoctoral researcher, in 2014–2015 she collaborated with public works to explore and analyse the values of temporary uses in Hackney Wick, Fish Island and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London. She is currently a lecturer in the Geography Department, University of Durham.**

**Andreas Lang is the co-founder of public works, a non-profit critical design practice that occupies the terrain between art, architecture and research. Working with an extended network of interdisciplinary collaborators, public works aims to re-work spatial, social and economic opportunities towards citizen-driven development and improved civic life. The practice, set up in 2004, uses a range of approaches, including public events, campaigns, the development of urban strategies and participatory art and architecture projects across all scales. Andreas Lang is currently a lecturer in Architecture at Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design and at the Umeå School of Architecture (Sweden).**



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Most books on temporary urban practice take the form of 'how to' manuals for practitioners, policy-makers and city planners. Filled with case studies and evaluation grids, they read like recipe books for making the perfect 'temporary city'. The idea for this book came from a shared dissatisfaction with such handbooks, and from a growing unease grounded in reflections developed over the years as urban researchers and practitioners. In piecing together this notebook we want to critically intervene in this celebratory discursive arena by making visible naturalised imaginaries and by interrogating and challenging the myth-making practices that too often underlie accounts of temporary urbanism.

Temporary urban use embodies multiple and contradictory value practices through which social, economic, cultural and political dynamics are conceived, reproduced and planned. At the core of this book is an exploration of these values, how they are articulated, by whom and why, and how they are negotiated and struggled over. Beyond offering a thick description, we take these values seriously as articulating and making visible the power relations between institutions, communities and temporarily vacant buildings and land. At stake here, we believe, is a collective critical ability to distinguish between different positions and to extricate alternative and progressive values from their recuperation into maintaining the status quo.

Two shared desires have informed our approach. The first was to register and analyse concretely how temporary practices and uses become embedded in urban landscapes, from planning, cultural and architectural practices to everyday language. This approach requires in-depth and situated knowledge of how the actions of institutions, networks and individuals interrelate with imaginaries and material dynamics of a rapidly changing territory. While most manuals are based on de-contextualised and

'transferable' case studies, this book is squarely situated in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, a neighbourhood under the limelight for its high concentration of artist communities and its position at the 'fringes' of the London 2012 Olympic Games. For a year we set about observing, reflecting and interrogating micro and macro transformations in and around the area, combining photographs, archival research, interviews, ethnographic notes, maps and drawings. In the process, we asked residents, artists, politicians and urban professionals involved in the area: what are the values of temporary urban use and who benefits from them? Their responses, sincere or calculated, confident or doubtful, excited or angry, guide the themes of this book.

Throughout our observations and conversations, our second desire was to develop and explicate a situated critical stance within a novel field of practice, from the dual standpoint of practitioners and researchers. In our critical approach we shared the 'pop-up disquiet' of community groups and residents who question the uncritical reproduction of narratives about temporary urban use as 'activating' vacant sites and 'bringing creativity' to neighbourhoods.<sup>1</sup> New and old tropes abound in the lexicon of temporary urbanism. In our analysis we wanted to pay close attention to the ways in which the same words and phrases, uttered by different actors in different settings, could mean radically different things and be mobilised for entirely different aims. In highly unequal and polarised cities like London, large disparities in power relations within specific temporary projects but also within the

broader field of temporary urbanism affect the resonance and reach of the different positions. These disparities are central to our discussion of the contested values of temporary use in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. At a time of hype around temporary 'fixes' to urban problems, it is important to record and make visible the inevitable tensions, conflicts and negotiations over meanings that are often smoothed over by official narratives.

- 1 Wick Session N°19, see *Wick Zine* 5, September 2014, <[www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collection/r-urban-wick-zine\\_5](http://www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collection/r-urban-wick-zine_5)>
- 2 Powell, H., and Marrero-Guillamón, I. (2012) *The Art of Dissent: Adventures in London's Olympic State*. London: Marshgate Press.
- 3 Design for London (2013) *Stitching the Fringes: Working around the Olympic Park*. London: Design for London/LLDC.
- 4 Colomb, C. (2012) Pushing the Urban Frontier: Temporary Uses of Space, City Marketing, and the Creative City Discourse in 2000s Berlin, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 34(2), pp.131–152.

The result is this notebook: a collection of non-linear narratives attempting to explore multiple tensions and entry points into the role played by temporary use projects in the transformation of a neighbourhood in a rapidly changing metropolis. Instead of a singular 'how to' story, in our notes we have tried to give equal weight to observations, conversations, fantasies, photos, documents, drawings, maps, gossip, media imaginaries and other fragments, in order to explore the multiple competing values, power relations and everyday negotiations of a 'temporary city' in the making. It is composed of ten notes, each of which combines different types of spatial and social knowledges, and varies in length, style and composition. At times the notes follow practitioners and researchers as they reflect on and negotiate the rapid changes and shifts in values and value practices in Hackney Wick and Fish Island; at times they take a critical step out, and at times they focus on a specific practice. Interspersed between the notes is a series of visual *intermezzos*, devised in collaborative dialogue with designers Villalba Lawson, which immerse the reader in the rapidly changing landscape and draw attention to the temporariness of its built environment.

Bridges, graffiti, rivieras and sweetwaters is an introduction to the neighbourhood by way of a bicycle journey along the Lee Navigation Canal, the physical and symbolic boundary between the neighbourhood and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. It has been transformed from a semi-urban landscape for leisure activities (Lee Valley Regional Park Plan 1964), to a landscape of enclosure<sup>2</sup>, to the 'stitch' that connects and generates paths into London's newest postcode area, E20.<sup>3</sup> Looking at temporary cinemas, festivals, short-term leases and pop-up retailers, this note explores competing and at times conflicting visions and values in the transformation of the waterway from urban 'fringe' to attractive connector.

Planning temporary urban vitality takes a step back to examine how policy-makers approach and legislate temporary and interim uses as tools for local urban development and place marketing.<sup>4</sup> This note reads local draft policy against the grain to identify values, rationales and expectations. It also analyses processes of consultation and public examination to explore local residents and workers' attempts at introducing and proposing different

practices and future imaginaries for the long-term post-Olympic redevelopment of the area.

Sometimes public commissions for interim uses give rise to slightly paradoxical construction projects. Temporary concrete offers a quick glance into the very material implications of overlapping understandings and regulations of a community-oriented temporary architectural project on a vacant plot of land. On the subject of commissions, one of the many shifts in the artistic and cultural landscape of Hackney Wick and Fish Island is the increasing present and projected future involvement of West and Central London arts institutions and museums. Takeovers and takebacks reflects on the different ways in which more established cultural institutions from other areas of London have become involved in local cultural activities and long-term masterplanning. It explores how the media, politicians and practitioners understand their arrival and the complex value processes they give rise to and intervene within.

Other times the key issue is gaining access to land, and temporary projects are designed as alternative currency to barter for space. P&ANK discusses discrepancies between the intentions and the realisation of a project of furniture design within a temporarily occupied vacant building. Here, minor details of execution and aesthetics are taken as significant indicators of radically different value practices and visions. In a similar vein, Capital-capital follows a group of performance artists in search for a low-cost studio and performance space. Seen from their critical perspective, the visibility and cultural capital gained over the years also became a type of currency, but the event-based financial model of the vacant building where they relocated eventually prioritised other forms of capital.

Poking fun at the language of planning and policy-making, Hubville is a tongue-in-cheek look at the proliferation of 'hubs'—existing and planned—within the neighbourhood over the span of a few years. Plan-making and urban development is also at the core of the Uchronian mapping, an experiment in critical spatio-temporal cartography exploring the multiple alternative pasts and futures of vacant buildings and sites in temporary use. Through the plans and desires informing the recent history of a

wharf in Fish Island, the note offers an example as well as a research tool to visualise conflicts and potentials of temporary use projects.

When access to land is difficult or prohibitive, mobility becomes a tactic. Floating is the diary of a milk float criss-crossing Hackney Wick and Fish Island over several years. The temporary vehicle was used as a location and pretext for a range of temporary projects and as a tool for establishing longer-term relationships through temporary occupations across the neighbourhood.

The Temporary City as never-ending festival concludes the book as a critical look at the logic of 'project-based' temporary urbanism and its relationship to precarious labour and the festival industry. The note interrogates imaginaries of spontaneity and creativity by analysing the arrival and consolidated presence of intermediaries brokering relationships and creating partnerships through professionalised temporary networks. With this final essay, the stated values of the temporary city as a blueprint for future cities are questioned and once again put into perspective through an attention to emerging practices and embodied critique.

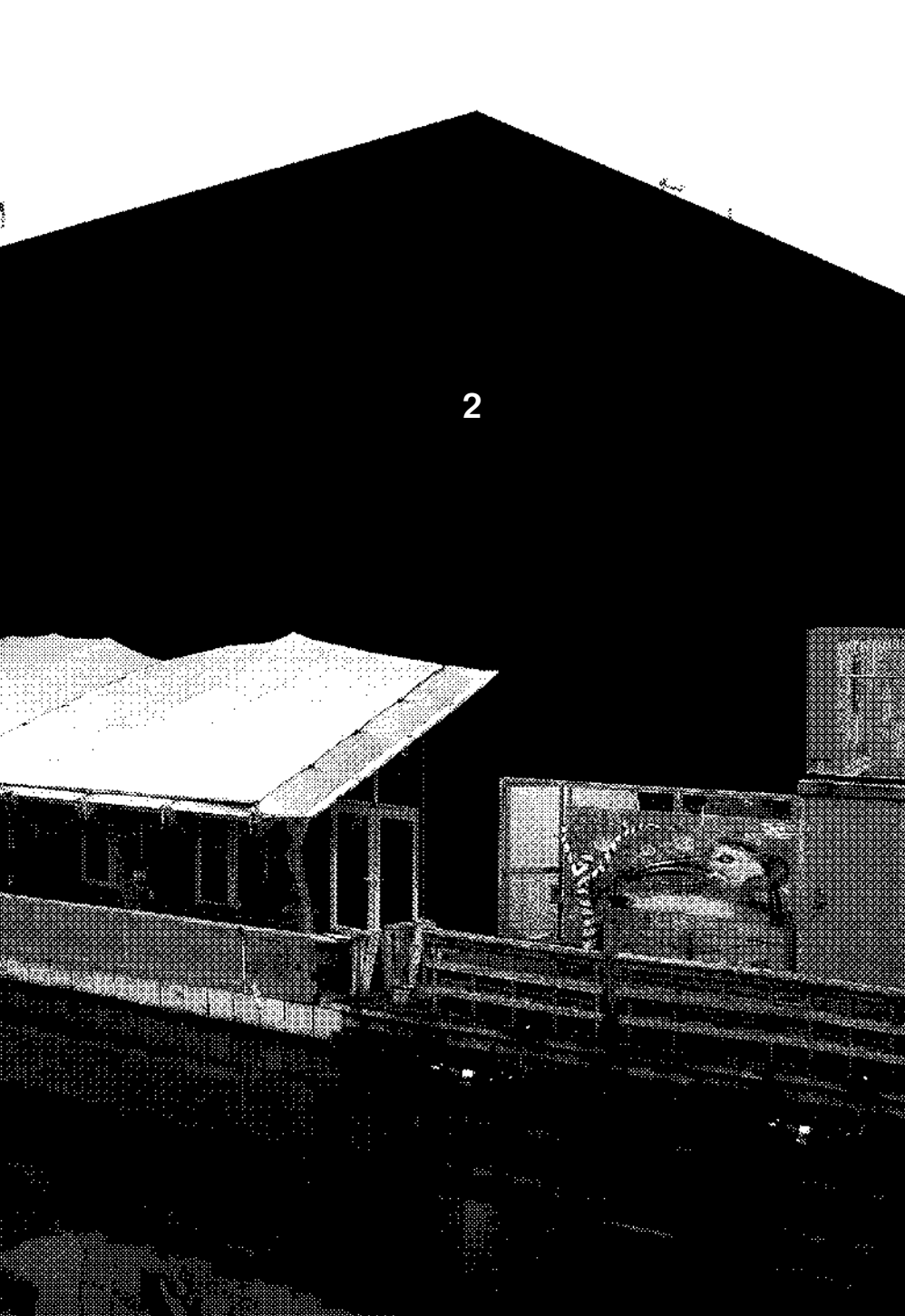
Mara Ferreri and Andreas Lang  
Hackney Wick and Fish Island, London  
January 2016



1







2







The quietest way to reach Hackney Wick from Clapton by bicycle is to ride along the Lea River path, on the branch that—after Lea Bridge—becomes the Lee Navigation Canal. For six years the strip of land and water has been the fenced boundary between East London and the Olympic site. Day after day, as I ride south, the landscape transforms. Temporary uses mark the most visible fault lines.

A few minutes after Homerton Road bridge, the semi-wild vegetation of Hackney Marshes is suddenly interrupted by the shade of two large bridges as I cycle under the East Cross Route motorways. Part of the undercroft is still covered by a raised platform of pastel-coloured wooden tiles. This is the first trace of a temporary project by the young architecture collective Assemble<sup>1</sup>. After realising the much-celebrated *Cineroleum*, a temporary cinema in a disused petrol station<sup>2</sup>, the collective built a temporary structure, called 'Folly for a Flyover', which was run as a bar and open-air cinema for nine weeks during summer 2011. Far from a spontaneous underground project, the Folly programme was curated in collaboration with long-established and city-wide institutions Create Festival and the Barbican Arts Centre.

The project was celebrated as demonstrating the potential for a 'neglected and unwelcoming non-place', 'a disused motorway undercroft [...] to become a new public space for the area.' Three years later, in my weekly cycles along the canal path the space seems very much a place, albeit not one that feels particularly welcoming to lone travellers. Like many large bridges and undercrofts nearby, the site is often used to carry out small and large repair jobs on moored boats and for storing useful materials such as wood and paint. The ever-changing graffiti on the walls and pillars point towards other nocturnal uses.

- 1 Assemble Studio  
<[www.assemblestudio.co.uk](http://www.assemblestudio.co.uk)>
- 2 See Bishop, P. and L. Williams  
(eds.) (2012) *The Temporary City*.  
London: Routledge.



11 June 2014  
31 July 2014

affordable workspace building in Sugarhouse Yard, Stratford.<sup>3</sup> Architecture critics claim, in an article evocatively titled 'from pop-ups to grown-ups', that Assemble's 'inspiring improvised architecture is helping to drive social change'<sup>4</sup>. I cycle on under two pieces of graffiti sprayed in white over two consecutive bridges, moving towards the Wick. The first reads: 'Change is the only certain thing...', the second enthusiastically completes the sentence 'Play your part!'. A few weeks later someone adds at the front of the second sentence 'Feel free not to' in yellow paint.

Unacquainted with the area, I am told by more knowledgeable local artists that the graffiti that are now visible on buildings and walls along the waterways are part of an Olympic Games-related project (by the Legacy List) and have replaced older, 'authentic' street art. These new 'gentrified graffiti'<sup>5</sup>

The collective claims that 'capitalising on the success of the Folly, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) invested in providing the permanent infrastructure which has allowed the site to continue as an events and cultural public space.' True, the metal fences that used to separate the path from the undercroft space have been removed; and I have been told that there is now access to water and electricity, as well as a tarmacked ramp leading sideways to the road above. Still, I never see the wooden platform being used for public cultural events.

Meanwhile, I hear that Assemble have moved on from Hackney Wick and consolidated their relationship with the LLDC through a commission for the Yardhouse, a temporary

were commissioned to international artists and raised local outrage, since in preparation for, graffiti pieces on the same walls were painted over by the local authorities.

- 3 Assemble Studio, Sugarhouse Yard <[www.assemblestudio.co.uk](http://www.assemblestudio.co.uk)>
- 4 Rowan, M. 'Assemble: from pop-ups to grown-ups', *The Observer*, 6 July 2014.
- 5 Wainwright, O. 'Olympic legacy murals met with outrage by London street artists', *The Guardian*, 6 August 2013.



16 April 2012

The media at the time interviewed the curator, who had organised an important Street Art Show at Tate Modern in 2008. He explained that the commission aimed to 'make a museum-quality exhibition in a public space.' The new graffiti look strangely glossy: I am told that they are coated with anti-graffiti paint.

One of the buildings covered in graffiti is 90 Main Yard. After beginning as a more or less temporary party and music venue, the organisers negotiated a ten-year lease and rebranded the space as an open plan hot-desking office and workshop space for freelancers, designers and artists, with a popular café and nightlife venue. In 2012, however, it was announced that the building would need to be demolished to make space for a larger bridge to connect Hackney Wick and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). Despite the museum-like aspirations of the graffiti, the building's future remains uncertain.

17 December 2014





7 May 2014

I am also told that on the shore across the path, in the north part of Hackney Wick, the embankment reclaimed by local estates' residents as Lee Bank Square was also affected by the Games. Volunteers who had renovated the communal garden with purple paint, donated by the famous local graffiti artist Sweet Toof, were told by 'Olympic people' to repaint them in a differ-

ent hue 'because purple was an Olympic colour.' Cycling on, the canal-facing northern tip of QEOP is marked by the grey striped bulk of the former Olympic Press and Broadcast Centre, then renamed 'iCity', currently branded 'Here East'. A metal fence surrounds it; inside, diggers and bulldozers transform the bank. Here East is: 'the home of making' in London, 'a campus that combines business, technology, media, education and data in the pursuit of innovation.' A 'habitat' and a place to 'cluster' for an 'emerging breed of innovators and digital makers.'<sup>6</sup>

It is a key site of the LLDC's Local Plan for meeting the 2030 local economic development target of 3,600 jobs—the most important strategic site for local job creation within the Olympic Legacy boundaries—in 'wholesale & retail, transport, accommodation, IT, info & comms, finance, real estate, professional, admin & support, education, health, arts/entertainment, other services.'<sup>7</sup> In the area, nobody knows for certain what the two buildings will actually contain once they are redeveloped. At a public meeting, I take a snap of the developers' illustration of the canal front after Here East is redeveloped: shops and cafés are imagined in an idyllic late summer glow.

Confirmed tenants so far include Loughborough University, the sports television channel BT Sport and the data centre service provider Infinity SDC. They are also hoping to attract restaurants and 'pop-up food retailers', following a city-wide trend of temporary fast-food and street food outlets in containers. Examples include the Boxpark Pop-up Mall in Shoreditch, and various temporary business incubators across the city, from Elephant and Castle to Brixton.

6 Here East <[www.hereeast.com](http://www.hereeast.com)>

7 LLDC (2013) Local Plan Consultation Document, December 2013, p.46.



19 September 2014

The model appears to be one of minimal and easily adaptable infrastructure to be let on short and flexible leases, but there are rumours that local start-up companies and freelancers will likely be unable to afford commercial rents without subsidies. I learn that the CEO of Here East is a former RAF senior officer who served in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, and who has previously worked at the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a think tank set up by the Conservative MP and former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan-Smith.

9 May 2014



Behind the layers of metal fences, I can see that the bank is being remodelled to include new pedestrian routes and children play facilities. I am told that all these community-oriented infrastructures don't belong to Here East, and are instead part of the development of a Canal Park designed, among others, by the architecture/art studio muf, who have a long history of urban



design work and temporary interventions in the Wick.<sup>8</sup>

At times, stretches of path are closed and alternative cycling and walking routes allow unexpected views of the new bridges. 'Improved connectivity' is the imperative of the Olympic Legacy, and the River Lea and the canal are often described as 'a barrier to east-west movement' and 'a tear in London's urban fabric.'<sup>9</sup>

17 December 2014

In December, I notice the appearance of an official Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park map post, marking the top North-West boundary of the Park and re-inscribing the canal path into its ordered geography. Further on, a new lawn is being laid out behind metal fences, in stark contrast to the wilting and dusty grass at the edges, as the Canal Park merges with the beautifying landscaping of the water-facing area of Here East. The area immediately south, on my left hand side as I cycle, is also the site of one of the five new neighbourhoods planned for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, aptly named 'East Wick'.

\* Up to 870 new homes

Floor space will consist of up to:

\* 91,000sqm residential

\* 5,300sqm employment

\* 5,600sqm community

\* 4,700sqm retail and leisure<sup>10</sup>

Later that month I hear that in preparation for the delivery of the residential units, the land will be used for temporary projects. As I cycle on, I observe barges and narrow boats, often double-parked and giving all signs that they are used for permanent or semi-permanent mobile residence. A friend who lives in one of them reports a rumour among his friendship group—young graduates recently converted to canal living—that the number of boat people in this part of London has increased by 500% in the last few years.

In February I also notice workers laying out new moorings made of cement and metal rings. A month later, they seem to have already rusted. Alongside the new moorings, small pumps have been installed on the towpath.



21 March 2015  
 21 February 2015  
 16 February 2015  
 21 March 2015

It is rumoured among travelling boat people that the Canal & River Trust is parcelling the towpath and the moorings to sell them on long-term leases or to use them for short-term, tourist stays. I cannot find any evidence of the former, but the latter has been commented upon on narrow boat dwellers' blogs.<sup>11</sup> A colleague tells me that even before 2012, narrow boat residents had complained to the media about being 'socially cleansed' from the area in preparation for the Olympic Games.<sup>12</sup>

Across the water, yet another temporary creative building: the White Building, 'London's centre for art, technology and sustainability' run by SPACE studio providers in partnership with the LLDC and Bloomberg. The formerly Clarnico Sweet factory building is currently let to SPACE on a ten-year lease. Building on a pre-Olympic art commission, the Floating Cinema, a mobile arts venue and cinema, was

- 8 muf architecture / art  
 <[www.muf.co.uk/portfolio/hwfi](http://www.muf.co.uk/portfolio/hwfi)>
- 9 LLDC (2012) Olympic Legacy Supplementary Planning Guidance, p.5.
- 10 LLDC, 'Six shortlisted to bring forward delivery of new homes on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park' press release, 12 March 2014.
- 11 'More Regent's mooring', Narrowboat.com, 4 March 2015  
 <[www.narrowboatworld.com](http://www.narrowboatworld.com)>
- 12 Griffiths, I. 'Houseboaters being "socially cleansed" from Olympics area', *The Guardian*, 9 March 2011.



31 July 2015  
22 July 2014

lockkeeper's cottage. A large hand painted banner pleads for funding to save the club. The club, technically the E20 EastEnders fishing trust, sometimes referred to as the E20 Fishing Club, is a two-room lock cottage whose use does not appear immediately legible, although I often see middle-aged men, some in anglers' gear, sitting nearby, or walking in and out of the space. I am told that you can buy a cup of tea and receive general help if you are a boater or simply a cyclist or walker confused about the meanderings of the waterways in that particular spot.

The campaign to save the club is directed at the owners of the building, the Canal and River Trust (CRT) who had given it to the 'club' on a temporary lease and have now issued an eviction notice. Club members, organisations and traders locally support the club to remain on site, particularly as it is argued that its presence has improved the safety of cyclists, walkers and boaters on a stretch of the canal that is less trafficked and less lit.

re-launched here in 2013 as a joint commission of the Legacy List and the Canal & River Trust, who manage the waterways.<sup>13</sup> Further along, other works occasionally block the path. Heading towards a large-scale temporary sports venue—the Olympic Stadium—the noise of the excavators remodelling the shores mixes with that of the metal workers who are 'dismantling' (downsizing) the 80,000-seat Olympic stadium, to a 60,000-seat multi-purpose venue, to be managed by West Ham United Football Club.

Further on, cycling is made even more impracticable by the fences for the construction sites, yet the route remains the fastest to reach Fish Island through the Old Ford Lock bridge. On the east side of the Lee Navigation Canal is located a brick

There is a petition circulated on local e-lists, in which the organisers state the core activities of the club:

13 Floating Cinema  
<[www.floatingcinema.info](http://www.floatingcinema.info)>



21 June 2014

**'The primary function of our charity is to support local fishers as well as to take disabled veterans, multicultural groups and disabled children out fishing. We fund these trips by running a tea room out of the old stable block which for the previous twenty years was left unused by Canal and River Trust.'**

The reasons for the eviction are not very clear, so I go to a meeting of the local Hackney Wick and Fish Island Cultural Interest Group (CIG) in July 2014 to hear the story from campaigners from the club. At the meeting, a representative from the CRT explains that the lease had been agreed when the CRT was still British Waterways, that is a publicly funded organization. As a result of a reduction in their public funding, in 2012 the organization became a trust: their objectives have changed, and the need to generate revenue from the assets they own has become greater. Apparently, the club organisers had offered to buy the building and raised some funds towards it, but the CRT refused the offer. As was later reported in the minutes of the meeting, a representative of the Trust explained that:



3 August 2014  
3 August 2014

**'Their objectives have now changed and they want to change the building into a community space with a whole range of events. They do not want to sell the building. He recognises that the area has changed and credits this to the Olympics.'**

The conversation is taken up again at another CIG meeting in October. The update since the summer is that the club has been asked to vacate the premises within two months. Two members of the CRT are in attendance and they explain to the full room their aim to turn the lock cottage into one of several welcome stations on the canal for community engagement and for volunteer development, as well as storage. When asked by members of the CIG why they would not establish a partnership with the fishing club, the answer brought up contentious uses of the cottage beyond what was agreed in the lease (mainly fishing activities). The issue seems to revolve around the sale to the public of tea and coffee: the CRT call it 'starting a café in the building without permission', while many in the room argue that selling tea in polystyrene cups to anglers and cyclists can hardly be considered 'running a café'. It also comes to light that the club had allegedly withdrawn rent for several months, which would constitute grounds on which to evict them, and that members of the organisation have had disagreements with their neighbours. One neighbour speaks out against them at the meeting mentioning a range of incidents that have made him and his family uncomfortable and even frightened by members of the club. Curiously, one such incident regarded a graffiti piece that had been painted over a wooden panel that was installed without permission

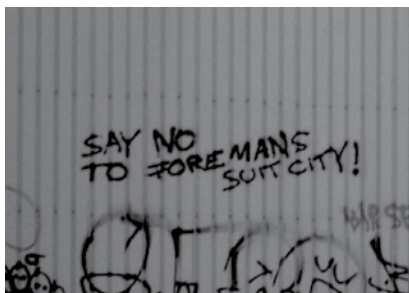
on a wall owned by the neighbour facing the canal. A discussion ensues about the value of the graffiti, which the neighbour calls vandalism while many artists and cultural workers in the room raise the point that it was a piece by Sweet Toof.

Across from the cottage is the 'Fish Island Riviera', a vacant plot of land turned into a riviera by adding sand and palm trees during summer 2012 in preparation for the Games. Similar spaces were set up with the idea that the Olympic crowds may want a quiet place to rest 'in style' on the fringes of the site, such as the aptly named 'The Fringe', a temporary private members club also established that summer inside Swan Wharf.

The Fish Island Riviera belongs to the H Forman & Son salmon smoking and packaging factory, one of the over two hundred and fifty businesses that were displaced from the Olympic site after the city won the bid for the Games in 2005. After long and drawn-out negotiations with the London Development Agency, the factory finally relocated to Fish Island, where it established an exclusive restaurant on the top floor of their main building.<sup>14</sup>

3 August 2014





Graffiti on the wall alongside the Hartford Union Canal seems to indicate that not everyone appreciates Forman riviera's new clientele. The land of the riviera had already been used as a temporary event space in summer 2011 when it was the site of 'Films on fridges', self-described as 'a pop-up cinema in Hackney Wick' (even if it was technically in Fish Island). The temporary cinema was partly constructed with fridges' components, in reference to a pile of fridges (to be recycled?) that used to be located where the Aquatic Centre is now.<sup>15</sup> Fast forward to 2012, I am told that the riviera was not very successful, and has been used ever since for private events and as a car park. In summer 2014 it was the main location of the Hackney WickEd Festival as the 'Hackney WickEd



3 August 2014  
3 August 2014

Riviera'. Across from H Forman & Son's riviera the second canal-facing new neighbourhood of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park will be built: Sweetwater.

- \* Up to 650 new homes
- Floor space will consist of up to:
- \* 67,700sqm residential
- \* 1,000sqm employment
- \* 8,400sqm community
- \* 2,500sqm retail<sup>16</sup>

The promotional material, alongside social and health facilities, draws attention to the waterways and the bridges.

'There will also be a beautiful canalside park along the Lee Navigation canal which improves the existing towpath for pedestrians and cyclists, providing spaces for play and recreation. New bridges will connect Hackney Wick, Fish Island and the Park for the first time.'<sup>17</sup>

The announcement fulfils the LLDC's and the Canal & River Trust's strategic plan for 'unlocking the potential' of the waterways presented at the GLA in June 2012.<sup>18</sup> Parts of the canals were designated as 'character areas', with the aim, among others, to 'fully explore the "added value" of the waterspace.'

Closing the arc of my daily cycle along the waterways, layers of temporary projects inscribe the contested transformation of this strip of land and water. From barrier to symbolic and physical bridge between Hackney Wick and Fish Island and the Olympic Park, the canal has been re-imagined as a 'museum-quality exhibition in a public space', a 'welcoming station', a 'riviera' and, with real estate developments increasing their pace on either side of the water, a 'waterspace' and a 'beautiful canalside park' for new residents and visitors.

14 Spectacle Films <[www.spectacle.co.uk/archive\\_production.php?id=553](http://www.spectacle.co.uk/archive_production.php?id=553)>

15 Scout Ltd's 'Films on Fridges' <[www.scout-ltd.com/filmsonfridges](http://www.scout-ltd.com/filmsonfridges)>

16 LLDC, 'Six shortlisted to bring forward delivery of new homes on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park' press release, 12 March 2014.

17 LLDC, 'Sweetwater' <[www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/the-park/homes-and-living/sweetwater](http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/the-park/homes-and-living/sweetwater)>

18 LLDC and Canal & River Trust (2012) A strategic plan for the waterways, presentation <[www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london\\_legacy\\_development\\_corporation\\_presentation\\_1.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_legacy_development_corporation_presentation_1.pdf)>





3



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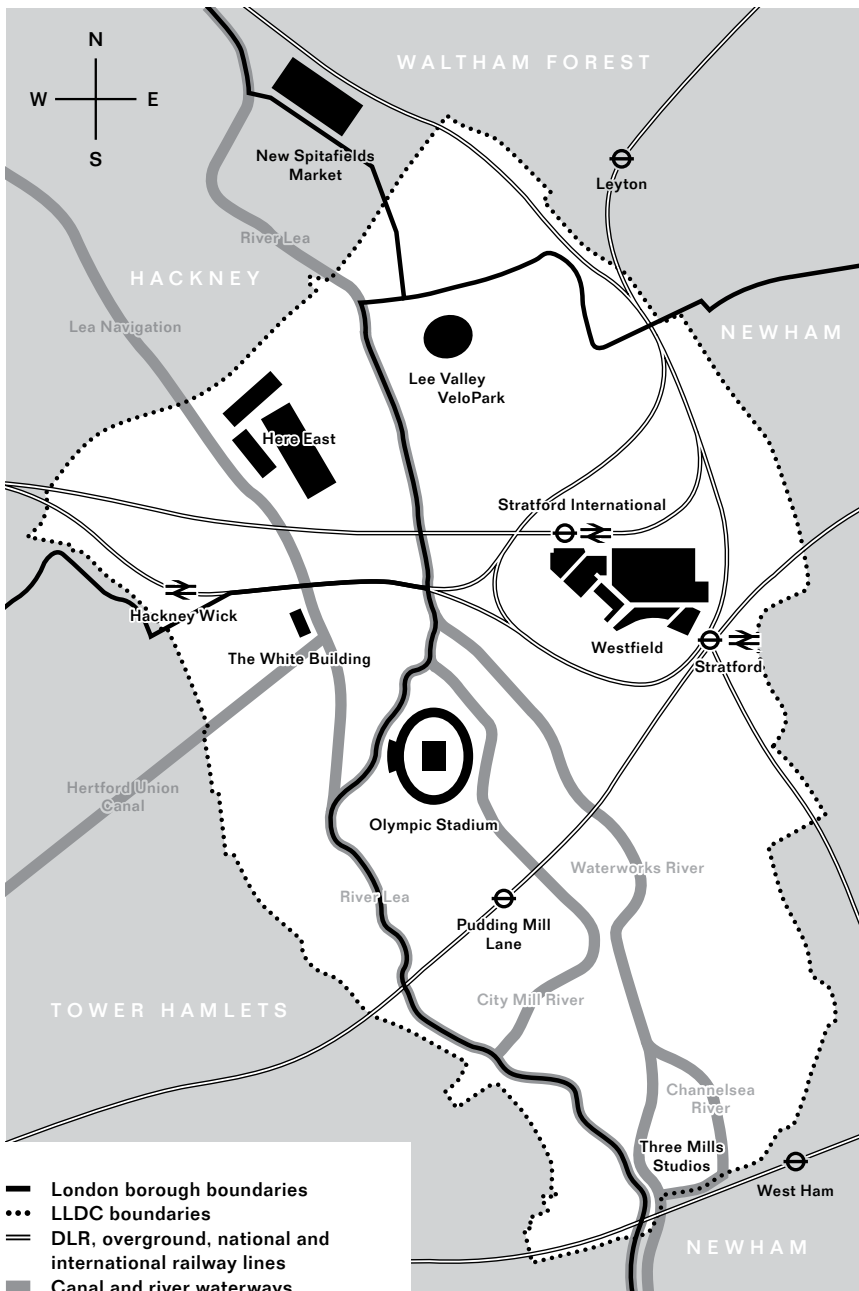
To policy-makers and planners, interim uses are tools for transforming the city. Their many aims and agendas are often couched in policy-speak whose underlying imaginaries of local urban development require a close and critical examination to reveal values and significant tensions. In Hackney Wick and Fish Island, an interim use policy made its appearance in the preparation, consultation and public examination of the draft of a Local Plan, the plan for the Olympic Legacy.<sup>1</sup>

As customary in contemporary Olympic Games, after the spectacle the Organising Committee and Delivery Authority established a development company, with the task of managing and overseeing the redevelopment and use of the remaining sports and residential facilities, and of the now vacant land acquired and emptied for the Games. In 2012, shortly before the opening ceremony, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) was established as London's first 'mayoral development corporation', a development vehicle introduced by the coalition government's *Localism Act* (2011). The LLDC's managing board was directly appointed by the Mayor's office with the task of planning and implementing the 'legacy' of the Games, through policy-making, local governance and targeted investment. It is now responsible for local planning within an area that extends well beyond the boundaries of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), including land in Hackney Wick (Hackney) and Fish Island (Tower Hamlets). Critical commentators have noted that the Corporation has become de-facto the (temporary) 34th Borough of London, and a planning and policy test bed for the capital.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014, the LLDC supported a range of temporary use projects in the neighbourhoods surrounding the

1 See <[www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/transforming-east-london/local-plan](http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/transforming-east-london/local-plan)>

2 LLDC (2013) Local Plan Consultation Document (December 2013), p.16.





4 March 2015

QEOP proper, from temporary community allotments and pop-up shops (Leyton) to roof gardens (Stratford) and skate parks (Hackney Wick). Alongside a directly-managed 'interim use programme', temporary pilot projects were commissioned and supported through small-scale funding and commissions, which identified specific sites for interim use on the 'fringes' of the QEOP, including along the Lee Navigation Canal.<sup>3</sup>

Policy documents and pilot projects fed into the *LLDC Draft Local Plan 2015–2031*, published in August 2014. The Plan sets out the parameters of 'local development'—economic, social and cultural—for the next sixteen years. The draft was open to public consultation, and in autumn 2014 local community groups, local residents, researchers, businesses, as well as members of the planning network Just Space sent official comments and objections to the

Planning Inspector. They called for an Examination in Public (EiP) of the plan. The EiP was held at the LLDC's headquarters in Stratford during the first week of March 2015.<sup>4</sup>

- 3 LLDC, LLDC's Grassroots Interim Uses Project (September 2014).
- 4 Just Space (2015) LLDC Local Plan Examination starts this week, 1 March 2015 <[www.justspace.org.uk](http://www.justspace.org.uk)>

### **Policy B.3: Creating vitality through interim uses**

Proposals for temporary interim uses will be supported where:

- 1 Land has been set aside for development in the longer term and the proposed interim uses will reinforce the long-term leisure, cultural or event-based uses;**
- 2 Vacant premises will be used for small-scale retail, community, sporting and leisure, community uses, or cultural and creative industries; or**
- 3 Managed or affordable workspace is proposed prior to delivery of long-term phased development with planning permission.**

Proposals must be able to demonstrate that:

- 4 The interim uses will not impact upon the deliverability of the site allocations within this Local Plan or extant permanent planning permissions; and**
- 5 The uses will have no unacceptable adverse impacts on the amenity or function of the existing permanent business or residential community.**

**Cross-reference to policies: B.2; B.4**

**London Plan policy: 4.6**

Within the Draft Local Plan, temporary use had a small but significant place in section 4 of the 'Developing Business Growth, Jobs and Lifelong Learning' chapter.<sup>5</sup> Policy B.3, titled 'Creating vitality through interim uses', outlined the circumstances in which the Corporation would support interim uses.

In preparation for the EiP, the objectors took issue with two points of the policy. The first concerned the overall approach of the legislator and urban development vehicle to temporariness. Policy B.3 frames interim use proposals in negative terms, by outlining what interim uses are *not* supposed to do: they are not supposed to impact on existing planning permissions, on the allocation of vacant sites for development and on the 'amenity or function' of existing businesses or residents. That is, interim uses would be supported and encouraged *if and when* their presence does not pose a challenge to existing as well as future uses of the land or building. In other words, they would be supported only if they prove useful to local promotional activities while remaining substantially irrelevant to present and future transformations, as clearly explained in the Reasoned Justification for the policy (paragraph 4.26):

'Within the Legacy Corporation area, there are many land parcels awaiting redevelopment within the longer term, as well as unoccupied small, retail or business units. Derelict sites and buildings can impact negatively on the perception of the safety and visual quality of the public realm. Interim uses can have potential to bring positive impacts through character and footfall, promoting economic prosperity. For these reasons, interim uses shall be supported where they create vitality and viability to streets, and create active frontages, as well as 'green' proposals such as community allotments and gardens.'

At best, interim uses are ephemeral interventions at the level of character and footfall, valued in so far as they promote economic prosperity by offering a spectacle of active frontage for streets needing injections of vitality and 'green' [sic]. As such, they are mainly valued as a

5 LLDC, *Draft Local Plan 2015–2031* (August 2014), p.33.

'creative cargo cult'—that is, a symbolic act simulating wealth—to attract economic development.<sup>6</sup>

The second objection concerned community engagement. Policy B.3 belongs to 'business growth, jobs and lifelong learning' and, in the language of the Olympic legacy, local communities should be key beneficiaries. Yet, argued the objectors, it is not explained how local businesses and residents would benefit from these projects; whether they would be involved in deciding what will happen in the temporarily available 'land parcels and buildings' or how they could participate in commissioning them. Moreover, while all precautions are taken for projects *not* to cause adverse impact on future development plans, the policy doesn't touch upon their likely adverse impact on the community *after* their end, nor does it outline any possibility of extending the uses longer-term, or relocating them to suitable, affordable local buildings or plots of land.

On this second issue, the Planning Inspector formally asked the objectors to present evidence about the need for more community engagement in the design and implementation of interim uses, and potential proposals for policy change. Objectors responded in writing that Policy B.3 should 'ensure that interim use proposals are in line with the needs of local communities in the area and will benefit them in the long-term' and proposed to include the following additional paragraphs:

'Where the proposals are community-led, the policy should ensure the opportunity for the interim use to be continued or relocated if necessary according to the needs of the local community.' [...] 'Proposals must be able to demonstrate that [...] they have been developed in collaboration with local business and community groups from the initial stages of scoping and design through to implementation and delivery.'<sup>7</sup>

During the EiP hearings, evidence was given by representatives from local artists' studios and studio providers in support of these additions. Together and separately they voiced a critique of the conceptual association between 'creative and cultural sector' and flexible, temporary spaces (paragraph 4.27). They drew

on experiences of art spaces in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, such as Mother Studios and SPACE, and of artists' studios demolished to make space for the Games or currently threatened by the development of the areas south of the Park, such as ACME Studios on Rowse Close, Stratford. They argued that cultural and creative communities need long-term affordable facilities, and the rise in pop-up spaces has an overwhelmingly negative impact on the sector, whose spaces are becoming ever more precarious. Research presented as part of the objections also considered that short-term availability risk excluding community groups and businesses in favour of temporary use professionals and intermediaries.<sup>8</sup>

LLDC's representatives from the Planning Department maintained throughout the hearing that Policy B.3 was 'sound' and did not require any amendments. As explained in writing:

'Community engagement through the development of all proposals is encouraged, and this includes temporary use applications; however it would not be appropriate to single out interim uses as specifically requiring community engagement in their development, as they are by their very nature temporary. The policy stipulates that interim uses should have no unacceptable adverse impacts on amenity, function, business or residential communities so these matters will be considered.'<sup>9</sup>

The Inspector was satisfied with the response and Policy B.3 remained unchanged. Temporary uses will continue

to be supported until 2031 as long as they 'create vitality' without interfering with the capital's business as usual in the form of upmarket residential and office developments, and as long as local communities and creative practitioners don't expect to have a say in actually shaping their long-term possibility to respond to actual local needs.

6 Peck, J. (2005) Struggling with the Creative Class, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, p.762.

7 Just Space, REP.LP.096-02 Just Space, Matter 2 Economy.

8 Ferreri, M. REP.LP.069, Statement for the LDC Publication Local Plan Examination. Response to Matter 2, question 18.

9 Statement on behalf of the London Legacy Development Corporation (9 February 2015) <[www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/transforming-east-london/local-plan/examination-of-the-legacy-corporation-local-plan](http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/our-story/transforming-east-london/local-plan/examination-of-the-legacy-corporation-local-plan)>



5









6



One evening in 2014, a crane lowered nine metal containers on a formerly empty plot of land at 67 Rothbury Road in Hackney Wick. The containers were to be transformed into a new, temporary, community and youth centre, partly commissioned by the LLDC, to be called Hub67. Temporary architecture is often described as 'makeshift': assembling heterogeneous and repurposed materials, making-do with discarded elements, operating inventively at the margins of mainstream practice, and at times, of established building conventions. The design for Hub67 was centred on a simple idea: the repurposing of some of the metal containers and metal fences used for the London 2012 Games still lying on site, which was appealing to the LLDC in their attempt to make sustainability a key term in the management of the Olympic legacy.

In fact, the idea of a community centre originated four years earlier, when the organisers of the local annual Hackney Wick Festival (not to be confused with the WickEd Festival) won the Big Lottery's 'Big Local Fund' (£1m). The fund aimed to help residents 'make [their] community a better place to live, changing things for the better' (Big Local, 2014). The organisers set up the 'Wick Award' and led a local consultation in 2011 to decide how to spend the million.<sup>1</sup> As narrated by a local resident, former youth worker and the chair of Hackney Wick Festival, the results of the consultation were overwhelmingly 'youth-centred': 'a community hub, particularly for young people, was something that was coming up again and again' at a time when long-term residents were seeing local shops transforming into 'the eateries, the cafes, those kinds of places that the average Hackney Wick residents can't afford or don't identify with.' Despite local support, finding a local venue from where to run a youth and community centre was the biggest barrier. For two

1 Wick Award <[www.wickaward.co.uk](http://www.wickaward.co.uk)>



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years the Wick Award organisers arranged meetings with civil servants, local politicians and the LLDC to garner support for their idea. One day, out of the blue, one of the organisers was approached by an LLDC officer at a local community event and offered a building on a temporary basis. It was 'a secret millionaire moment' as she could not tell anyone until the plans were officially confirmed. The plan involved the LLDC commissioning a temporary structure on vacant land owned by the corporation and awaiting redevelopment. After logistical and legal delays, in late autumn 2013 a small number of architecture studios were invited to tender for the design of a temporary hub. The bid was won by studio Lyn Atelier in early 2014, but it took over six months to start construction. One of the reasons for this was that the plans to redevelop the land were postponed, meaning that the temporary building would be used as a community centre for more than two years. While this was excellent news for the community group, it also meant that the construction had to be subjected to building regulations, which is usually not the case for interim structures. As explained by an architect

from Lyn Atelier, this decision greatly changed the construction process:

Essentially, if a building is up for more than two years it is classed as a permanent building in the eyes of the building regulations. You have to design it as if it would stay for twenty years. At the moment we are talking with the structural engineers because they specified a huge amount of concrete to go into the footings, as we can't rely on the poor ground quality. Therefore we need to put in very deep pad foundations to stop the building from subsiding. The pad foundations are 1.7 meters deep, 1.2 meters by 1.2 meters wide and there are a lot of them, and a lot of excavations. But that's an awful lot of concrete to put in! The guys at the LLDC came up with the idea of putting a raft foundation in, which would be a slab rather than pads and the structural engineer said, yes you can do this but you [the architects] would have to take the liability. So we are back to pouring massive amounts of concrete into the ground... and that doesn't seem very temporary. We said, can we not do screw foundations? But it was three times the cost! So in the end, pouring the concrete foundations was the cheapest and the clumsiest way of doing it...





7

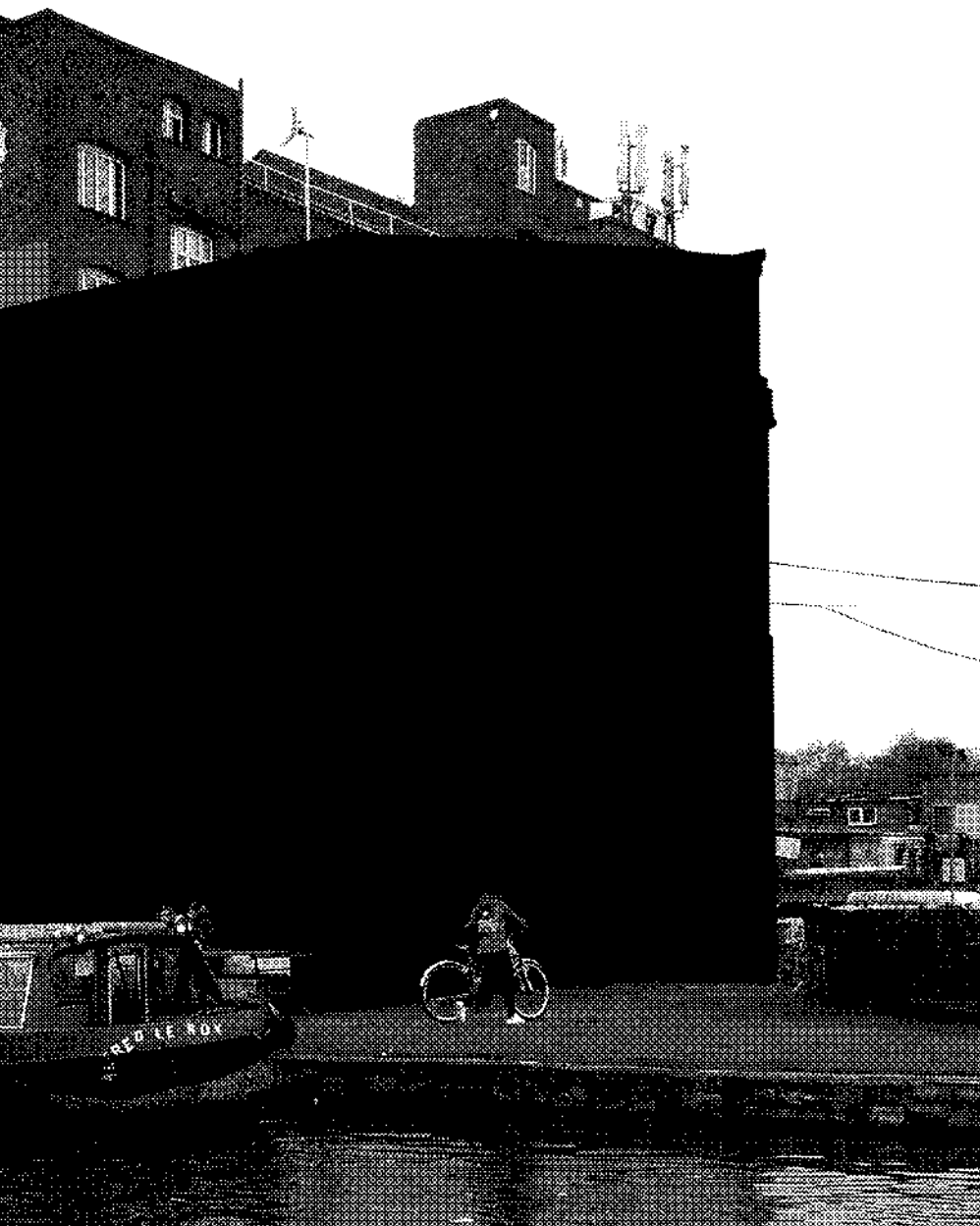
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On Friday 28 February 2014 a few local groups and organisations from Hackney Wick were invited by the Victoria & Albert Museum to symbolically take over one of its halls for one evening, as part of the V&A Friday Late programme. While some groups involved considered the 'Hackney Wick Takeover' event a success because it provided an opportunity for young people from the local school to visit the V&A—and, for some, West London—for the first time, others were more sceptical.

Members of the cultural scene in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, such as public works and local resident and practitioner O, were critical of the 'takeover' logic, and in May 2014 organised an event in response, titled 'Hackney Wick V&A Take Back' at Swan Wharf.

- AL We thought that maybe we could work with the idea of a 'take back.' The idea was really about [doing something] against big institutions coming and saying, now we sanction you good enough for our halls... it wasn't so much about inviting the V&A back, it was more about, we make all this effort of producing [an event] for them, why don't we also show it at home, why do you need a museum to sanction it, why don't we do our own take over?
- O But we did invite them back. And they politely declined the invitation!
- AL But I think the point is that we don't need them...

Beyond this small scale act of symbolic role reversal, the presence of the V&A in the area is increasingly felt by some as a sign of the planned colonisation of the local cultural 'fringe' production by large scale publicly funded West London institutions.



# Get set for the Olympicopolis

The worlds of academia, dance, art and fashion are teaming up to turn the Olympic Park into a huge new cultural quarter. **Andrew Neather** hits the starting blocks

stitutions will build outposts in the Olympic Park



**W**ALKING past the Olympic Aquatics Centre on a grey, drizzly December day it is hard to envisage the future of the surrounding spaces. Where the giant bouncy castle-like water polo arena stood on the other side of the bridge from Westfield, there is just a long, empty strip of land.

Yet in six years, with Zaha Hadid's swooping structure on one side and the Olympic stadium opposite, there will have risen here a vast new complex, housing a major new arm of the V&A, the University of the Arts London and an outpost of Sadler's Wells, as well as 700 new flats and assorted shops and restaurants. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Aquatics Centre, by 2018 a

including Central Saint Martins and the London College of Fashion, will move 6,000 students and 500 staff to its new buildings. Vice-chancellor Nigel Carrington is optimistic about the logistics of the operation, UAL having moved Central Saint Martins to its present King's Cross location in 2011. He likewise sees many synergies with UAL's new campus-mates, and with the East End's fashion industry.

For the V&A the new space will allow the museum to display many objects in its collections that it cannot at present. But chief operating officer Tim Reeve emphasises that the new site will also be "a different type of museum", bringing together collections, research and curation – and letting visitors see such normally hidden processes.

3 December 2014

The V&A Takeover had taken place less than three months after the Mayor of London Boris Johnson had penned an article in the *Evening Standard* announcing his vision for the Olympic Park to become 'the Albertopolis of the east', with the new site of the V&A – V&A East – at its centerpiece.<sup>1</sup> The Mayor informally named the plan 'Olympicopolis':

'The idea behind Olympicopolis is simple and draws on the extraordinary foresight of our Victorian ancestors. We want to use Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park as a catalyst for the industries and technologies in which London now leads the world in order to create thousands of new jobs.'<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, Albertopolis (whose name was partly a satire about the impact of German-born Prince Albert's ideas about cultural institutions on the shaping of West London at the time) was built off the back of a Victorian mega-event: the 1851 Great Exhibition.

After months of speculation on the little information available, in September 2014 the plan was announced by

an LLDC officer at a public meeting of the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Cultural Interest Group. The new developments on the Park were to include 'a new cultural quarter', potentially incorporating new venues for the Victoria & Albert Museum, Sadler's Wells and the University of the Arts, as well as an academic campus, with the overall goal of bringing 'new audiences to the area.' Extracts of the ensuing debate were succinctly minuted by the group:

Q Fantastic opportunity, but also a potential threat? Surely it's better for the organisations involved to establish relationships with locals?

A Mike Bloomberg, the former mayor of NYC and founder of Bloomberg Associates now has a philanthropic company offering advice to cultural destinations around the world. He is meeting the Mayor of London and chief LLDC executives so they can start learning about the local area. This visit is planned for the end of September.

Q Will this create tension between the local community and these new developments?

A Of course this is to be expected, but this is why [officer] is working to broker relationships between the two for the next four to five years.<sup>3</sup>

Summoning the Victorians alongside current mayors of other global cities was clearly not going to convince all the small arts organisations and individual practitioners

who had made Hackney Wick and Fish Island their production and exhibition space in partial autonomy from the world of sanctioned cultural programming.

However, the name 'Olympicopolis' stuck, and £141m funding was announced with much fanfare in December 2014 across the printed press.<sup>4</sup> The names of Sadler's Wells, the V&A and the Smithsonian Institute were variously floated,

1 'Boris Johnson: The Olympic park will be the Albortopolis of the east', *Evening Standard*, 4 December 2013.

2 'Olympicopolis: Multi-million pound cultural hub planned for Olympic Park', *Evening Standard*, 4 December 2013.

3 Hackney Wick and Fish Island Cultural Interest Group, Minutes of the meeting on Friday 12 September 2014 <[www.hackneywick.org/about](http://www.hackneywick.org/about)> (accessed 5 February 2015).

4 Ellis-Peterson H. 'London Olympicopolis culture hub plan gets £141m funding', *The Guardian*, 4 December 2014.

as well as that of University College London. A local resident active in several campaigns for the conservation of affordable creative work spaces reflected that many in the area have seen the move as 'the state-sponsored invasion.' He noted that publicly-funded West London cultural organisations:

So far have shown no inclination or appetite to engage with the creative communities here. And they have got maps that call Olympicopolis the creative quarter of this part of London. That's bullshit, this is the creative quarter. They are seriously talking about stealing the name. This is the thing, now they are being overt about recreating West London in East London, and it's starting to come out in conversations openly for the first time.

To stress the point, he recalled hearing that a developer working on the Olympic Park had said to a local artist that in ten, fifteen years there will not be any artists left in Hackney Wick: 'he said it openly... as a matter of fact. That's the commercial way, the way of things.'

The Barbican too has been developing relations with local spaces and practitioners through a temporary take-over of their central London venue, organised by the social entrepreneurship The Trampery. The 'Hack the Barbican' event (5–31 August 2013) was subtitled 'a playground for arts, technology and entrepreneurship' and took place in the institution's public foyers for a month of activities and exhibitions. 'Hack the Barbican was like a slowly growing city that is gradually taking over the Barbican's public spaces.'<sup>5</sup> According to one of the organisers at an open meeting in May 2014, the event was aimed at 'getting away from the institutionalisation of the art world.'

In 2014, the Barbican collaborated again with The Trampery to open Fish Island Labs, in the still half-empty Swan Wharf, Fish Island. The official narrative positioned

the starting point of the collaboration in a shared desire to extend the 'Hack the Barbican' experiment over a longer time period in order to support practitioners. This, combined with The Trampery model of taking

5 Hack the Barbican

[www.hackthebarbican.org](http://www.hackthebarbican.org)

6 Charles Armstrong, founder and director of The Trampery, quoted in the press release <[www.barbican.org.uk/news/artformnews/education/barbican-and-the-trampery-to-open](http://www.barbican.org.uk/news/artformnews/education/barbican-and-the-trampery-to-open)>

over disused or under-used buildings and transforming them into short-term work space for digital and creative practice, led to the idea of the Fish Island Labs: a one year 'incubation project', or 'tech accelerator for the new generation of digital arts'<sup>6</sup>, launched in June 2014. As explained by a local entrepreneur, The Trampery negotiated access to the space and the Barbican provided small sponsorship, but its most important contribution was symbolic: 'the Barbican offers a brand association.' For O, the rationale for bringing into the area a large arts organization such as the Barbican is pivoted around a strategy of visibility and capacity building:

- The Trampery brings an example of the next level. The Trampery's value is that they can bring [an organisation like] the Barbican. Space tried to bring the Barbican, the LLDC have tried... and the Trampery was the one that managed to do it because they had a relationship with them, because they worked with them, and because they were specifically looking at the digital world and at the interface between the arts and [digital]... it's not just the Trampery, it's the Barbican. And the Barbican for the first time brings the credibility of a major London, a major national arts institution. To be putting their hand up and saying, we are going to invest our reputation, our contacts and some of our money, in a project, a very temporary project, but an experiment in Hackney Wick, just to see what happens, that is great... both bring credibility. And capacity building [...] that's all that Hackney Wick and Fish Island needs. If the LLDC, the Legacy List, or anyone can deliver anything of any use to the creative communities here is helping people to build their capacity so that they can be part of this long term... and I hope that happens.

MF How do you think a temporary project builds capacity?

- As I said, there is a spotlight. It's a resource for the local community [...] There is certainly some value. And I think we've seen a shift in the attention, and I think this is it. Because Hackney WickEd is building its capacity and getting better at doing what it's

doing, but I also think that having the Barbican here makes other publications, newspapers, art writers go, hey what's going on in Hackney Wick, why is there all this stuff happening? Which is only good for the area, I think. For the creative side of things, at least. [...] the more profile there is on Hackney Wick and Fish Island, the better the opportunity for people being discovered.

This simple narrative of discovery seems to forget or strategically overlook that the spotlight on this allegedly neglected area of East London was switched on over a decade ago, first with the preparations for the Olympic bid, then with the unprecedented visibility of the 2012 Games. In fact, institutional connections across the cultural sector intertwined with the development of Olympic-related activities. As commented by a former employee of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiads, regardless of the individual stories, many of the 'high end' cultural institutions that now appear seemingly out of nowhere were introduced through partnerships and networks created during the four year of extended programming of the Cultural Olympiads (2008–2012); in fact, both Sadler's Wells and the Barbican were Olympiads' Delivery Partners. As an official supporter, the Mayor of London's Office too was a crucial player in raising the visibility of the cultural programme through connections with other GLA-led activities<sup>7</sup> and committees, such as the London Cultural Strategy group, a 'high-level advocacy group' established to 'develop and promote London as a world-class city of

culture.'<sup>8</sup> The opportunity for developing culture-related tourism in the run up and during the London 2012 Games is considered a key success of the Cultural Olympiad program,<sup>9</sup> and in fitting with the overall vision of an Olympic Legacy that is redeveloping the area—materially and symbolically—as a domestic and international 'destination.'

With high culture and the digital arts and technologies driving the vision of redeveloped East London,

7 Garcia, B., & Cox, T. (2013) *London 2012 Cultural Olympiad evaluation*. Liverpool: Institute of Cultural Capital, p.145.

8 GLA (2010) *London Culture and 2012 Handbook. Inspiring people to get involved in 2012* <[www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/culture-2012](http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/culture-2012)> See also <[www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/london-cultural-strategy-group](http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/london-cultural-strategy-group)>

9 Garcia and Cox, Ibid. Chapter 4 'Tourism Development.'

10 Games Monitor (2011) University College London propose redevelopment of the Carpenters Estate Stratford <[www.gamesmonitor.org.uk/node/1435](http://www.gamesmonitor.org.uk/node/1435)>



YOUR AD HERE



11 July 2014  
27 October 2014

ough University *in London.*'

It has been frequently noted that Here East is not technically in Hackney Wick, but residents and local workers have more or less accepted that the neighbourhood has now symbolically expanded to include different spaces and activities beyond the juridical boundaries of the Wick Ward. Even the online page of Swan Wharf claims to be 'an unusual location with stunning views, situated on the Grand Union Canal, Hackney Wick', while in fact being in Fish Island. As commented in August 2014 by a local councillor: 'Hackney Wick has become a brand.'

The tension between takeovers and takebacks is thus debated in terms of allegedly opposite approaches. With 'Hackney Wick' becoming a brand, conversations in the area seem to pit the model of Swan Wharf and Fish Island Lab against the planning language of 'drop down' art institutions, inherent in the plans for a new Cultural Quarter. On the one hand there is the small-scale tech entrepreneurial model of short-term low-budget investment, wrapped in the language of tech accelerators, incubators and precariously perched on or nested

the higher education sector should not be forgotten as another key component of the reformulation of London as a global destination. This includes plans by UCL (and its much-publicized and contentious new campus),<sup>10</sup> currently reappearing in the development strategy for the area surrounding the Aquatic Centre; The University of the Arts London, within Olympicopolis; Queen Mary University's involvement in 'Hack the Barbican' and subsequently in Fish Island Labs, and even Loughborough University, through Fish Island Labs and as a prospective tenant at Here East, to name just a few. The latter has proudly added its logo under the Transport for London Overground sign at the local station, renaming Hackney Wick 'Home of Loughbor-

inside vacant buildings, which equates to creativity and dynamism. On the other, the large-scale public sector-funded cultural production and consumption, and the functional zoning and visions of culture-led regeneration evoke old and rigid formulas, out of touch with new urban economies. This juxtaposition reproduces the antithesis between creativity and government intervention at the heart of neoliberal 'enterprise discourse.'

'On the side of freedom and prosperity are the qualities of enterprise, initiative, self-reliance and their outward manifestation, entrepreneurship. Ranged against them, but about to be swept aside, are the evils of progressive taxation, government control and welfarism.'<sup>11</sup>

Setting aside facile associations between self-reliance, freedom and entrepreneurship, the local intensification of institutional 'takeovers' and 'takebacks' marks a definite shift towards the area's increasing visibility but also its vulnerability to market forces. Outside the binary of enterprise discourse lies the possibility of off-market spaces for 'creative' practices that are neither 'entrepreneurial' nor sanctioned by the institutions of high culture. The question of value production and channeling returns to the fore in the reflection of a local art-architect practitioner:

Maybe it's nostalgic, but I see the Barbican arriving as not just positive, necessarily. Suddenly, it takes a certain space away. Suddenly it's a big arts organisation moving in. [...] it feels nearly in the same push as the V&A, maybe less aggressive, or maybe more? [Both are] kind of cashing in on the cultural capital that has been created through all the people who work quite hard for very little money. And where does that value go?

11 Armstrong, P. (2005) *Critique of entrepreneurship: people and policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.41. See also Harvey, D. (1989) From 'Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: the Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', *Geografiska Annaler* 71, pp.3–17.





9





10





One of the reasons why the art-architecture studio public works decided to move to Hackney Wick was to root our temporary practice, which until then had involved projects in a range of locations across London, the UK and Europe, within a specific urban location. With its mix of industrial and artistic uses, Hackney Wick offered a rich social and material situation within which to experiment with the idea of using design to aid new and critical ways of producing and sharing spaces through alternative economies of gift, reuse, borrowing and lending. The move and the development of this more rooted approach coincided with the studio becoming a partner in the European project R-Urban, which aimed to explore the possibilities of 'urban resilience' by introducing and supporting network of resident-run facilities on the model of closed ecological cycles for alternative models of living, producing and consuming. Projects were devised to engage with these different economies and social exchanges, as well as a strategy to gain access to spaces and to establish relationships with local organisations and individuals.

The P£ANK project came out of a desire to experiment with designs that made use of existing found materials and to engage with networks of exchange and with spaces already present in the neighbourhood. The name refers both to the basic material (wooden planks) and to the intention of using the design and furniture as a form of alternative currency. P£ANK can be described as a prototype open source furniture system. It is inspired by the designer Enzo Mari's 'Autoprogettazione' principles developed to produce high quality and functional furniture from found materials, and conceived in reaction to the expansion of mass produced furniture in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The project aimed to produce an easy-to-assemble furniture system that re-uses scaffolding

1 Mari, E. ([1974] 2002) *Autoprogettazione?*, Mantova: Corraini.



boards and timber pallets, two materials that were readily available locally.

Pallets and scaffolding boards are a material of choice and pragmatism in Hackney Wick. Pallets are easy to obtain, often at no cost. Even though there is a good pallet reuse system in place, many still fall out of this system and get discarded. With many manufacturing and waste disposal industries still working in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, it is easy to harvest them on a regular basis. On the negative side, taking a pallet apart is time-consuming and the pieces of timber are small and often of poor quality. Scaffolding boards are larger and the planks are normally only used as external floor coverings, which means that they don't have too many nails and therefore can easily be machined and re-used. Moreover, the British Standard grading system decrees that scaffold boards can only be used for a limited amount of time, after which they have to be sold or given away for free, in turn providing another cheap resource for self-builders. Scaffolding boards, like pallets, have become ubiquitous building materials in ad hoc and

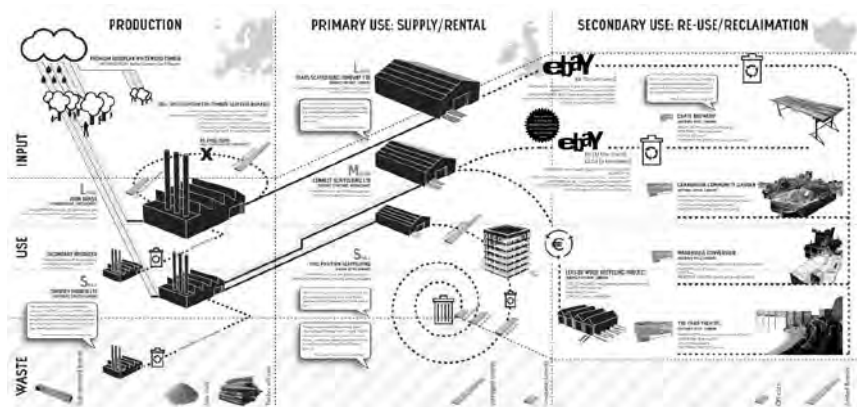
self-build projects. However, they are not always the ideal building material, as the quality of the wood in both cases is not high.<sup>2</sup>

The project was designed to be economical with both the materials used and the labour invested in making the pieces. The shape and finish were dictated by the choice of the material and by the idea that they could be easily assembled by an amateur builder. It was developed over a three-month period with the help of Botyo Dimitrov, a young architecture student on an Erasmus Exchange programme from Bulgaria who had no previous experience in carpentry. As a form of alternative currency, the P£ANK prototype was also produced in exchange for space to house the Wick On Wheels milk float and the proposed R-Urban Wick tool library.<sup>3</sup> We started conversations with Swan Wharf when the warehouse was still empty and unoccupied. Swan Wharf presented an interesting opportunity as it not only provided ample indoor spaces but also a secure courtyard and access to workshop space on the ground floor. The coordinators of Swan Wharf were initially interested in being associated with the ethos of R-Urban, which engaged with the local community as well as with ecological aspects and practices of re-use.

Prototypes and test pieces were regularly discussed with the project manager from 'The Hive', the company that oversaw and managed Swan Wharf. In this period numerous designs emerged, including floor tiling made from pallet wood and partitions to provide visual and sound barriers between the courtyard and the canal-facing restaurant that Swan Wharf and Truman Brewery were establishing at the time. Tables, chairs and stools were conceived to furnish this new bistro, to be called Cygnet. The restaurant would occupy the ground floor at Swan Wharf for a two-year period and the idea was to set it up with minimal resources. The re-use of materials and furniture was thus partly a financial decision, but

- 2 The wood used to produce scaffold boards in the UK is European Whitewood, which has superior structural integrity, inherent in the tree's genetic make-up. Scaffold boards come in standard thicknesses (38mm which is the most common, 50mm and 63mm), a width of 225mm and a maximum length of 3,900mm long. The ends of the boards are protected against impact damage by metal plates. Pallets usually come in two standard sizes, 800 × 1,200mm and 1,000 × 1,200mm. Pallets that have no mark are not treated against invasive species or plant diseases. Treated wood pallets are stamped with either HT (heat treatment) or MB (chemical treatment with methyl bromide). The methyl bromide treatment is now banned in the EU and is not recommended for furniture use.
- 3 R-Urban Tool Library

[www.r-urban-tools.net](http://www.r-urban-tools.net)



Chain of sourcing scaffolding board in Hackney Wick (public works / R-Urban).

also an aesthetic one, as the look of 'found materials' has become accepted and even prized. After

designing and building several prototypes, The Hive started to manage the production of the furniture for the restaurant using their network of semi-skilled carpenters from the festival networks. As The Hive has a background in festival and events production, in many ways their attitude to design, furniture and fit-outs is closely related to a culture of theatrical 'props' built to last for a specific production and to be discarded afterwards. The aim of a prop is 'to look real' in a convincing manner, without much consideration for materiality or functionality. In theatre and festival lingo, props need to 'read well' to the audience which in most cases has only a fleeting engagement with them.

The building focused mostly on tables and outdoor benches. The chair designs were considered too labourious (and therefore too expensive) to assemble and they were also deemed not 'pretty' enough for a fine dining experience. Similarly, the untreated timber planks of the original design looked too yellow and the tabletops made from pallet wood were too coarse. To 'look real' in the world of 'fine dining', the yellow timber was varnished in light brown and much time and effort were spent sanding and filling the tabletops to produce a smooth finish. Both treatments created an effect similar to 'stone washed jeans', when a material gets artificially worn out to create



Cutting schedule to minimize labour and maximize the reuse of the materials. The thicker planks were cut in half and used for support; the thinner and shorter pallets were used for the surfaces.

the patina of having been in use for a considerable amount of time. A temporary use item, produced through re-used free materials, was overlaid with a patina of 'authentic' use.

In Enzo Mari's words, designed objects can be accurate or 'formalistic': formalism is 'something that is considered as embellishment, but an embellishment which is both un-informed and powerless.'<sup>4</sup> The 'stone washing' of pallets and scaffolding boards may appear a small gesture in the context of the profound transformations of Hackney Wick and Fish Island, but it highlights wider shift in values around re-use and temporary occupations. 'Cashing in' on the makeshift aesthetic, this 'stone washing' makes the furniture look 'real' and 'reads well' to a new and fleeting audience which is uninterested in the politics of the

'makeshift' but enjoys the consumption and celebration of a purely formalistic 'makeshift look.'

Shortly after the Cygnet opened with its polished PEANK furniture, we hosted a Wick Session entitled 'Co-Producing the Makeshift.'<sup>5</sup> The session discussed how temporary, improvised and vernacular spatial interventions could offer an important alternative to the dominant production of urban spaces, but also how they were being recuperated and aestheticized by mainstream urban activities.

4 Interview with Enzo Mari, *Make Zine* online, 20 April 2013 <[www.makezine.com/2013/04/20/enzo-maris-autoprogettazione](http://www.makezine.com/2013/04/20/enzo-maris-autoprogettazione)>

5 See *Wick Zine* 5 <[www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collection/r-urban-wick-zine\\_5](http://www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collection/r-urban-wick-zine_5)>

T H E

11

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In 2009 a loose network of young performance art practitioners came together around a program of free events in squatted spaces in London. The network formed to develop and show new work and to create an autonomous and free platform where they could self-organise and experiment with complete freedom of expression. Under the name ArtEvict, for two years they organised regular events across over eleven social centres and squatted spaces across three London boroughs, involving as many as forty performance artists.

In late 2010 a core group of six artists from the network decided to get together and rent a warehouse in an industrial estate on White Post Lane, Hackney Wick. In this way, IPerformance Space1 (PS) came into being as a platform, a group and a venue comprising individual studios as well as a large event space. A young live artist told me that if we imagined ArtEvict as a stream, fluidly appearing in the occupied cracks of the city, always on the go, then PS would be a pond where the fast-moving water of the performance art network could finally collect. The artists signed a three-year lease till January 2014. At the time, the street was blocked to the east by the blue fence that surrounded the construction of the 2012 Olympic site. Some of the surrounding buildings were empty; the occupied ones housed a bakery and storage facilities for distributors of meat and of fruit and vegetables.

In the autumn of 2013, the owners of the warehouse told the artists that their lease would not be renewed and the collective had less than six weeks to find an alternative venue and studio space. They came across an ad on the online platform ArtQuest about a newly opened warehouse in Fish Island, called Swan Wharf, that was looking for creative projects to use the space. They visited the place and were immediately convinced to move in, so they began negotiations with The Hive, the company



14 February 2011  
14 February 2011

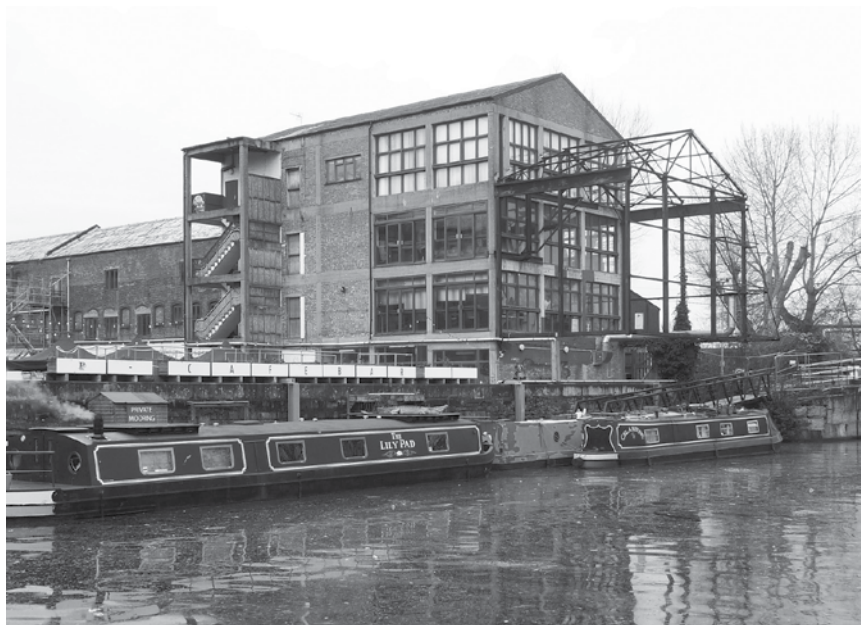
that managed the site in the interim period—an estimated two to five years—before the approval of the planning application to demolish and develop the site into residential units. After a few months, PS was looking to move again. In June 2014 I asked one of the founders to tell me the story of their relocation.

**MF** You accepted to move in temporarily even if you were not very keen on the idea of a temporary lease. Why?

**PS** We tried to explain that we didn't necessarily want a temporary space and we were hoping the space could become permanent. Waiting for a decision, we accepted temporary. Moving was such a nightmare that it made more sense to move in here because there was a chance that it could become permanent, rather than moving into studios where we knew we would definitely be temporary.

The collective put together a proposal. In exchange for paying a limited rent for an open plan studio space, they proposed to run their Arts Council-funded programme on the first floor, using it as an exhibition and performance space. At the time, they felt that the programme would be perfect to meet the needs of the organisers 'to create a cultural hub.' Six weeks after moving into the space, they heard that the Barbican had started negotiating with The Hive to move into the space.

**PS** The Barbican decided to take the space, but they wanted the space that we were in. And they had a huge budget to renovate it. We were told that they



30 May 2014

would be setting up a performance studio space with an attached event space, to which we were like, well, we think that is a bit problematic, because that's actually what we do. I think there is a lot of political tension in the area and we think it's very problematic if an arts organisation came and did exactly what we were already doing. So we aired that, and then the next we heard was that we had to move out of the space and the whole Fish Island Labs concept was born. The organisers said that we could have another studio in the space, but they were incredibly expensive... [so] we broke a deal.

**AL** Were there other artists in Swan Wharf?

**PS** Yes. Metal works, fashion designers, people who make decorations for festivals, much more creative industries than artists.

**MF** What happened to your programme of live art events?



4 June 2014  
11 July 2014

**PS** We discussed with them that if we took the studio space we would still have access to the rest of the building for our kind of practical work and to run our programme. That was agreed. Towards the end of February, beginning of March, we said, look, we really need it in writing that we are going to get access to the exhibition space because we have a really big Arts Council-funded programme to deliver, and we need some kind of security.

At that point [their] answers were, you will always have access to some kind of space but we can't say for certain which one. And we said, we can be flexible for studios, but actually if we got a quite established artist coming from the States or South America to put on some work we can't really house them in a cafe bar! It's not really appropriate, it's not really professional. And at that point they said, actually we can't guarantee your programme after all. So we were like, right, we are now back to looking for a space.

Our program was meant to launch at the end of April, so we took the decision to postpone it until September. It was a difficult conversation to have with the Arts Council, but actually it was better to do that than to run something not how we would do it. We would have been embarrassed to have people here and to not be able to put on their work properly.

**MF** In the meanwhile, did you host events in Swan Wharf? Were the organisers flexible about use of the space?

**PS** They've been flexible with us using the top floor studio, but we can't really book it in the calendar because

they might need to take a commercial booking. Our studio artists can look at their booking calendar and if there is nothing booked in they can just pop-up there and do some filming or whatever, but if we want to organise an event, we simply can't book it.

AL You mentioned a specific event when this dynamic was particularly problematic.

PS That was when we had Ron Athey. He is a seminal body-based artist from the United States. He was involved in the culture wars in the 1990s and has since moved to London. Before [it] all went wrong, he had put an Arts Council application in. He proposed for his new work to take place in PS and said that he would receive support in kind and that there was a venue, all of that. His application was successful just as [it was] all going wrong, and we were then in a situation where we had committed the space to someone and now couldn't guarantee it. We spoke to them about it, and again they were like, we can't guarantee the date for you because we might have to take a commercial booking.

MF What did you do?

PS Eventually, it meant that Ron's team had to use their contingency money to pay for the hire of the space. We were trying to say to them, we understand that you are a commercial business, but this is a ticketed event, there will be hundreds of people here. In the end we managed to get it down from the original price based on the fact that we knew we would have an audience of around 200 who would be drinking in the bar all night.

I don't think they were expecting the levels of people... the event sold out in 48 hours, all 200 tickets. It was all a bit stressful and it made the whole thing really confusing. We weren't quite managing the space but then they weren't quite managing the space, it was all a bit strange.

AL In what way?



4 June 2014

**PS** On the night there was a lot of tension between the staff here [Cygnet] and some of the audiences... the bar manager told someone that he had to leave because he was about to go into a cubicle with another man. He was like, you can't do that, and so he said, ok we won't do that. But then he was told he had to leave the premises anyway. So he said, you said we can't go into the cubicle together and we haven't, so what is the problem? The manager said, we have a zero tolerance drug policy so you have to leave. And the guy was like, well, you know, I am a gay man and I was just going to go in there to suck this guy's cock... to which the manager was like, this is indecent exposure and you have to leave now!

And I get it, of course, they are a proper bar, they have to have a drugs policy in their licensing, I totally get it. But that was also a two-hundred audience of primarily gay men... That evening was very interesting, polar ends of the world colliding in Swan Wharf!

Cultural capital is not a phrase we would have used before entering this relationship, but I think

actually it is, and it is something of real value. It's hard to equate it in a spreadsheet, but it does...

This area has become what it is because of artists, spaces and people who have been working and doing things here. People are interested in culture and that's why they come here.

**MF** But if they wanted the cultural capital of PS, why did they renege on the original agreement?

**PS** I think that as much as they initially wanted our cultural capital, it transpired that they actually needed our capital-capital, because they are doing a job for the property owner. I believe the whole set-up here is not about making a cultural hub, but about building revenue out of pre-existing artists and practices, and a creative environment.

We are an artist-run space. We do generate income from other artists, and we will do that in our new buildings, through artists paying for studio space. But we don't do that to create revenue, we do it because we want to provide a space and services, and genuinely develop something. Whereas it seems here that there was an empty building in what is a very cool up-and-coming creative place and it's people who don't necessarily have a direct interest in the arts or culture who are now cashing in, making a lot of money out of it.





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In networks, a *hub* is a *node* that has connections with other nodes. In models of networked urbanism, priority is given to naming 'nodes' and linking them into networks, in a logic of infrastructure development: communication, transport, production-distribution logistics, but also social and cultural. In urban policy use, the word 'hub' embodies a range of aspirations for a successfully networked place: to become a site of access, a center of convergence and a key relay point for various economic and social activities. Connectivity is the key that opens people and places to the wonders of the networked city.

A palimpsest of proposed hubs litters the recent planning and urban development history of Hackney Wick. A prime example is a 2011 mixed-use 'Hackney Wick Hub' plan on land acquired in 2010 by the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC).

The London Borough of Hackney has prepared and adopted the Hackney Wick Area Action Plan which includes an area of land encompassed by the A12, the Overground Line and the eastern branch of the River Lee within the Olympic Park. The AAP identifies the application site as one of two primary nodes within the Hackney Wick area. The key issues for the hub area are that creative and cultural industries are supported, services for the local community are provided and the connectivity throughout the area is improved. Land uses that would be considered by Hackney Council point towards creative and cultural industries, services and housing. Proposals include an innovation centre, residential, studios, gallery and exhibition space, cafes/bars/restaurants, convenience food, education, community facilities and creative industries.<sup>1</sup> Creative and cultural industries, services and entertainment, but

1 London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2012) Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting 9 February 2012 regarding the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation's Planning application PA/11/01865/LBTH (July 2011).

also housing and, crucially, transport. As explained in the planning application:

'The Hackney Wick Station improvements are seen as a specific catalyst for the creation of the Hub, particularly to ensure that new town centre uses are successful and to improve north-south connectivity through the area. The development is highly accessible by public transport [...] since Hackney Wick Station is located just one stop from the Stratford Regional transport hub.'<sup>2</sup>

In September 2012, the Hackney Wick Hub scheme re-appeared in Hackney Council's adopted Hackney Wick Area Action Plan, which boldly declared that 'the Hub will be the new heart of Hackney Wick' and simultaneously 'create a unique gateway to the area.'<sup>3</sup>

As a node of nodes, the Hackney Wick Hub scheme aims to 'serve new and existing communities in the surrounding area, particularly the extensive working population of the Creative Media City' [later renamed iCity, now Here East]. Hackney Wick Station and the Hub will become a key point of access for many places, including Victoria Park, Mabley Green, Hackney Marshes, Creative Media City, leisure uses within the Olympic Park and the extensive waterside areas created on both sides of the Lee Navigation.<sup>4</sup>

18 April 2011



Despite an approved planning application, the land of the Hackney Wick Hub remained vacant. In early 2012 the London Legacy Development Corporation commissioned an art and community programme of temporary uses on the sites. A portion of the land was taken over in summer 2012 by the temporary skatepark Frontside Garden, which was originally meant to last three months. A second plot was subject to an invited tender

2 Ibid.

3 Hackney Council (2012) *Hackney Wick Area Action Plan* adopted, paragraph 4.3, p.18.

4 Ibid.

5 Hub 67 <[www.hubsixtyseven.com](http://www.hubsixtyseven.com)>



13 February 2015

in late 2013. The winning proposal, later named Hub67 (from the address, at 67 Rothbury Road), consisted of a temporary youth and community center, fabricated out of re-used shipment containers from the Olympic Games. It was finally built in 2014 and launched in December 2014 as a temporary community hub, waiting for the Hackney Wick Hub scheme.

17 February 2015

'Hub 67 is a new community space in Hackney Wick and Fish Island for young people and local residents [...] developed through a partnership of Wick Award Partnership Panel and London Legacy Development Corporation in direct response to the engagement and consultation undertaken as part of the Big Local Programme across the Ward. [...] next to Frontside Skate Park, Hub 67 is a new focal point for residents, hosting events, classes and community groups.'<sup>5</sup>



By that point, the language of hubs had seeped into policy and planning to indicate nearly every development plan or site both within Hackney Wick and into the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, as explained by S., an LLDC officer, in September 2014.

S At that time [early 2012] the LTGDC ‘hub scheme’ had an outlined planning application...

AL What was that?

S The London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, it had put forward a planning application...

AL I was confusing it with Hub67...

S Yes, it’s confusing, really confusing. But it was called ‘the hub.’ It’s funny because people still refer to what we are doing in terms of masterplanning at Hackney Wick as ‘a hub scheme’, so there are two hubs.

AL It’s really nineties...

S Yes, it’s really nineties... And it’s funny because we also had ‘north park hub’ and ‘south park hub’ and they were sort of planning terms [...] for a long time they were called park hubs, we couldn’t get away from it...

The Hub. A hub scheme. The north park hub and the south park hub. With the LLDC, the economic focus of the language of hubs has become more explicit.

‘The need to promote the area as a new economic hub for east London while maintaining its current economic base, and enabling each of these sectors to build on their own strengths, has driven the economic strategy set out within this section and the Local Plan as a whole.’<sup>6</sup>

Connectivity to productive and transport networks will continue to be key to decision-making about urban development plans in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, with proposals for development ‘considered acceptable



9 February 2015

where they: relate well to key nodes of public activity and routes.<sup>17</sup> Propelled by the sweeping grand language of urban economic development and large-scale redevelopment plans, the word seeps into rebranding efforts by studios and rehearsal spaces in repurposed warehouses, such as the night-life and artist studio 'The Hub Studios' established in nearby Wallis Road in 2012 and advertised as 'a "Hub" for the ever-growing talent in and around London. A great base for the creative culture [sic] to collaborate!<sup>18</sup> More modest in intent, in October 2014 a mobile kiosk opened in the nearby Queen's Yard. It successfully inspired entrepreneurial connectivity between Olympic Park construction workers and low-income Hackney Wick creative types for breakfast, lunchtime and late night snacks.

6 LLDC *Draft Local Plan 2015–2031*, (August 2014), p.24.

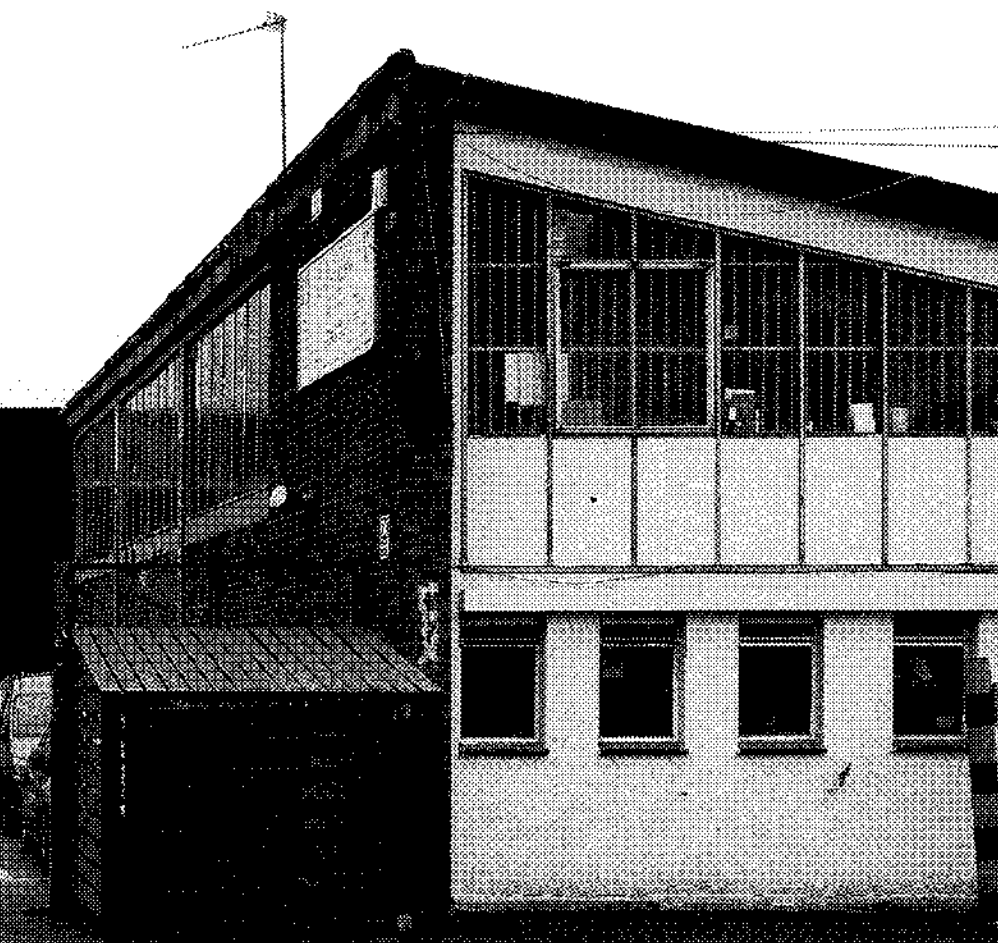
7 *Ibid.*, p.154.

8 Resident Advisor

<[www.residentadvisor.net](http://www.residentadvisor.net)>



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The 'temporary city' operates by colonising imaginaries of urban futures. In the 'temporary' urban blueprint, vacant buildings become sites where imaginaries are projected and contested. As a researcher and a practitioner interested in thinking about alternative uses of vacant spaces and the potential of temporariness to challenge existing urban dynamics, we set out to find ways of representing uses of temporarily vacant land that could disrupt or at least challenge linear understandings of urban development.

In the process, we encountered 19th Century French philosopher Charles Renouvier's novel *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire) / Uchronia (Utopia in History)*. Renouvier proposed a liberal utopian re-imagining of how European civilisation could have developed differently along liberal democratic values. The volume includes several appendices and prefaces, and a diagram accompanying a pretended 'publisher's note'—*Postface de l'éditeur*—that discusses the method for writing uchronias and the difficulties and paradoxes facing a 'uchroniste.'

In the process of becoming 'uchronistes' ourselves, we decided to focus our mapping on the alternative future pasts of Swan Wharf, from a vacant site to a place of temporary uses. In our method, we decided first of all to look back to challenge the usually vague origin of temporary use projects—'in a dilapidated/empty/abandoned building in East London'—which all too often serve to reproduce a naturalised linear narrative of vacancy and urban development. The process enabled us to reconstruct not just the history of the specific building and various planning applications (proposed, amended, rejected, approved), but also of adjacent sites. In examining extant proposals, we read community members' objections and examined various design

1 Renouvier, C. (1876) *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être*. Paris: Bureau de la critique philosophique.

iterations and recommendations. These, and information gathered about landowners and recent property transactions, formed the backbone of the 'what happened' and of the 'what was supposed to happen' paths in our bifurcating timeline. We placed our starting point (X) in 2002.

We then decided to investigate some of the rumours, opinions and discussions that circulated about the past, present and future of the site. The analysis of formal and informal interviews with eighteen local residents and workers, and of online materials such as local blogs and companies' websites formed the basis for the 'what could have happened' component of the diagram. Graphically similarly, but actually substantially differing from Renouvier's diagram, each possible future was marked by a letter.

A lower case letter – a – represented 'what was supposed to happen'; a lower case with a superscript – a<sup>1</sup> – signalled 'what could have happened'; an upper case capital letter – A – marked the turns actually taken by history.

In trying to give the reader of the map some indication of major macro events that could have influenced the more localised decisions and detours about the uses of the building, we also included horizontal 'event lines', such as London's winning bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games (July 2005) or the establishment of the local Fish Island Conservation Area (October 2008).

The final map is structured in four vertical columns: a vertical uchronian diagram on the left hand side, while on the right three text columns with brief descriptions of 'what happened' (e.g. A), 'what was supposed to happen' (e.g. a) and 'what could have happened' (e.g. a<sup>1</sup>), graphically aligned to the actual points on the map.<sup>2</sup> The diagram starts from a point of Origin (X) at the bottom of the page, set by the author as a critical moment where

the mapping should begin. 'What was supposed to happen' (A) moves in a straight line vertically from the point of Origin. 'What happened' (a) is a deviation from A and is slightly offset to indicate a diversion from the initial intention. This is an

2 Our preliminary uchronian map, <[www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collectionuchronia](http://www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collectionuchronia)>; see also Ferreri, M., Lang, A. and Firth, R. (2016) Future(s) Perfect: uchronian mapping as method for critical urban research, Livingmaps Review, 1(1).

intuitive process and has no underlying metric to measure the degree of departure. A third line is added to mark a plausible alternative scenario that could have changed the trajectory of development.

Time travels from the top downwards, rather than from left to right of traditional timelines, allowing the more intuitive horizontal reading to cut across the three scenario columns. These are given equal weight, to propose a less linear understanding of the development. In this way the map can be read sideways as well as from top to bottom or bottom to top.

## Key events

July 2005: London wins the bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games.

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October 2008: Fish Island Conservation Area proposed and consulted on.

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November 2009: Fish Island Conservation Area adopted by the Borough of Tower Hamlets. It includes Dace Road and Swan Wharf, but there are no listed buildings.

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29 July – 12 August 2012: London 2012 Olympic Games. The promised tourists' traffic in the area does not materialise because TfL regulates Overground train traffic.

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2013: first iteration of planning application by the Anderson Group [now No.14/00262/FUL (LLDC)], comprising the 'demolition and retention of facades to existing warehouse buildings fronting onto Dace Road with new 2/3 storey extensions above, and construction of new buildings [...] to accommodate 1,734m<sup>2</sup> (GIA) approx of commercial floorspace and 37 residential units.' The application is reviewed and it is estimated that it would take at least two years before it is approved.

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Negotiations begin between The Hive, the Barbican and The Trampery about using the first floor of Swan Wharf as a temporary residency space.

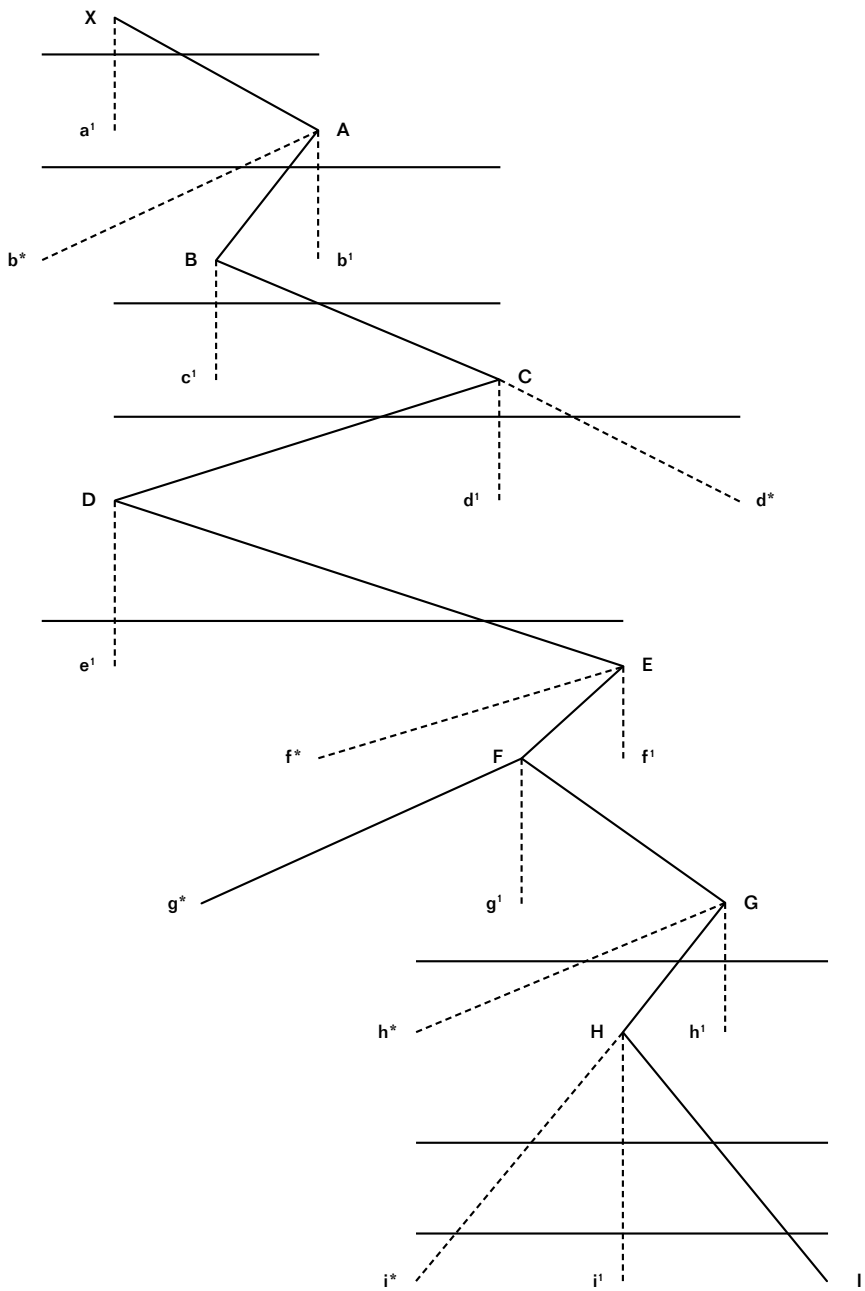
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April 2014: the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is opened to the public. A series of pedestrian bridges now connect the Park to Hackney Wick and Fish Island.

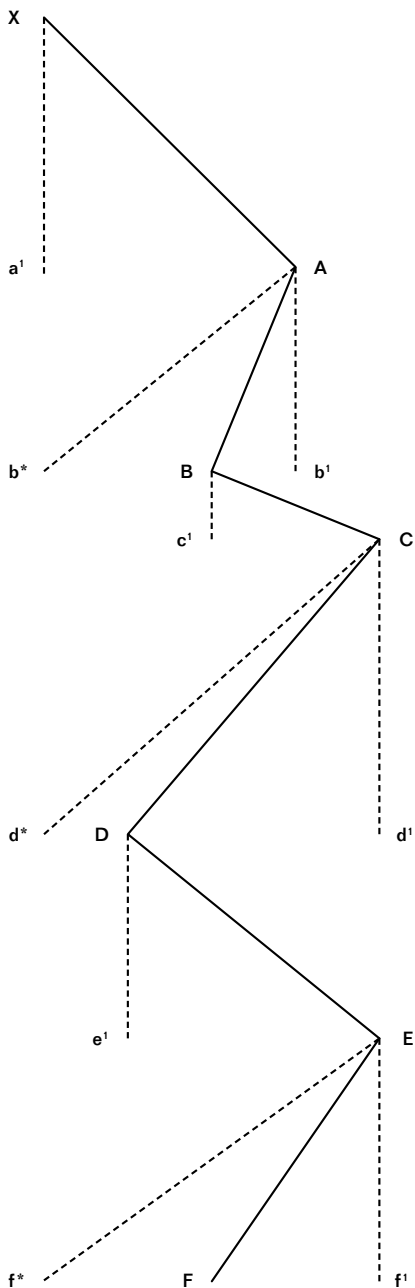
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July 2014: launch of Fish Island Labs, a collaboration between the Barbican and The Trampery based on a ten-month lease of the first floor of Swan Wharf.

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## Uchronian map

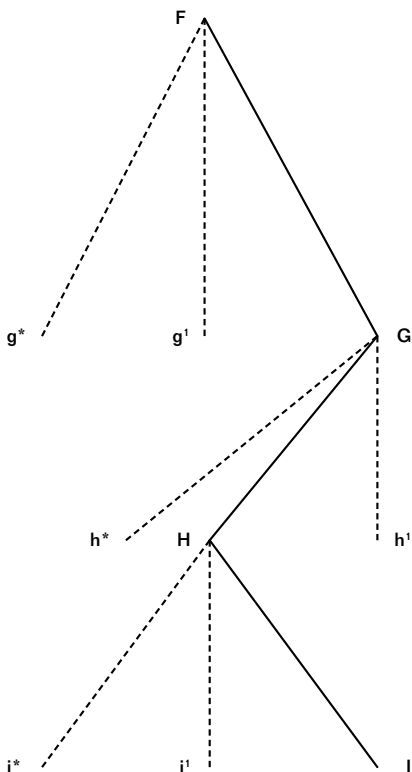


## What happened

- X** November 2002: planning application submitted for the 'demolition of the existing four-storey office block and three timber, steel and brick buildings. Retention of the existing three-storey 'stable block' fronting Dace Road and its conversion into six Class B1 office units [PA/02/01754]. The buildings belong to the Old Ford Works site. Nothing happens for five years.
- A** May 2007: Datalink Ltd pays £9,600.00 to buy the freehold of the site from Percy Dalton (Holdings) Limited (of the Percy Dalton Peanuts Factory). December 2007 [PA/02/01754, Tower Hamlets] is approved. It proposes the demolition of the canal front buildings and the opening up of the courtyard.
- B** Part of the site is demolished but the 'stable block' remains empty.
- C** February 2011: planning application submitted for 'temporary change of use from Class B1/B8 industrial to sui generis hospitality venue' [PA/11/00481]. Approved.
- September 2011: further applications enable the owners to build a new mooring.
- July 2012: the riverfront side becomes a 'a pop-up private members' club' for the duration of the Olympic Games. The daily membership starts at £90.
- D** September 2012 – November 2013: site is empty but refurbished: 'They tried to do short term leases on it and they just hadn't had any interest at all because of this planning application. From the landlord point of view they couldn't find anyone who was willing to take it for [only] two years.' (Interview, 4 June 2014)
- E** Spring 2013: two musicians propose to use Swan Wharf to expand their existing local café and music venue, turning it into a place for live theatre and performance. After many negotiations, the owner asks them to pay full rent and they pull out because it would have been financially 'impossible.'



## Uchronian map



## What happened

**F Summer 2013:** two friends who work in festival production and PR events ask the owners to moor their boat along the pontoon in front of Swan Wharf. Then they set up their new offices inside the building. Shortly after they create a company (The Hive) and agree with the owner to manage the building (rent-free) until the planning application is approved (2–5 years). The Hive hires the space out to generate revenue, mostly for film and photo shootings and corporate events.

**G December 2013:** The Hive advertises on ArtQuest a call for creative projects to use the space. Performance artists from PS approach them and negotiate use of the first floor as a studio and performance space. Revenue from commercial hires is used to set up a workshop on the ground floor.

**H Spring 2014:** PS struggles to have priority in using the space against more profitable commercial hires.

**June 2014:** seminal live-artist Ron Athey performs at PS and the event is sold out in 48 hours. Despite the success, the arrangements for Fish Island Labs force PS to move out of Fish Island.

**I September 2014:** objections to the planning application are submitted by individuals and community groups.  
**November 2014:** revised application is submitted. **April 2015:** application still pending.

## What was supposed to happen

- f<sup>1</sup> The first planning application for the redevelopment of Swan Wharf is submitted.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- g<sup>1</sup> PS artists continue to use the first-floor as low-cost open plan studio and performance space and soon other artist and community groups start to negotiate similar ad-hoc low cost agreements.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- h<sup>1</sup> November 2014: the application proposal is approved.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- i<sup>1</sup> The revised application is approved. Fish Island Labs is asked to leave earlier than the agreed ten-months, most buildings are demolished to make space for residential and commercial developments.

## What could have happened

- f\* The two musicians negotiate a low-rent temporary lease. The space rapidly becomes a well-known music and performance venue. Fish Island sees a renewal of its dwindling night-life. A successful crowd-funding campaign helps transforming the site into a permanent venue for performing arts. The place becomes a community-owned social enterprise on the model of Portland Works in Sheffield.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- g\* The space becomes a low-cost performance art venue and workshop space, catering for the needs of local artisans. The individuals involved in using the workshop begin to organise and self-manage as a group and convince the owner that he doesn't need an intermediary.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- h\* The Hive-Swan Wharf managers recognise the value of PS as the only organization entirely dedicated to performance and live art in England, and confirm the exclusivity of use of the first floor. In May 2014 PS run a very successful Arts Council-sponsored programme of live art events.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- i\* The application is rejected on the grounds that it does not provide any affordable housing. The LLDC argues that the 'heritage-led' approach and the provision of affordable workspace are not sufficient to grant permission.

## Guidelines for drawing your own uchronian map of temporary use

- 1 Choose a starting point for your diagram (X) and place it in the middle at the bottom of the page.

All stories have a beginning; When a site is vacant, always try to take a step back to ask: what used to be there? When and why did it become empty? Most pop-up space narratives presume a tabula rasa; a critical map questions any story that starts with a white sheet.

- 2 Temporary uses are first and foremost about access to land or buildings. Ask: who owns the site? How long have they owned it for? What did they hope to do with the site? *What was supposed to happen?* What happened to their hopes and plans? *What actually happened?*
- 3 Draw the first two lines of the diagram. What was supposed to happen is marked by a lower case letter at the end of a vertical line perpendicular to a given point of origin (X). What happened is marked by an upper case letter and appears at the end of a sideways line, generating a new point of origin.
- 4 Time is represented vertically and is marked by event lines. Event lines point at events that appear significant and capable to influence either the actual or potential unravelling of uses. From the specific site you can expand your questioning to the neighbourhood, area and even city at large.

Ask whether the site is affected by zoning regulations, e.g. a conservation area? What else was happening to the area and city, e.g. was an Olympic bid under way?

5 Changes to land and buildings are regulated by planning authorities.

Ask: what is the planning authority relevant to the site? Are there submitted, pending or approved planning applications? *What was supposed to happen?* Has there been opposition to proposed plans? Have alternatives been proposed? *What could have happened?* What could have happened is marked by a lower case letter with a number at the end of (a) sideways line(s). The points suggest plausible alternatives, fictions that could have become a reality.

6 Temporary uses are about use.

Ask: who uses the site? How did the current users negotiate access? *What happened?* What made their negotiation successful? What did they want the space to become? *What was supposed to happen?* Were there other individuals and groups trying to use the space? Were there divergent visions? *What could have happened?* Several plausible alternatives can exist at the same time and dotted lines suggest further developments of these alternative stories, marked by a lower case letter followed by an asterisk.



17





PLAY THE GAME

NEEDLE

PIG'S E

FINGER

HONEY

APPLES

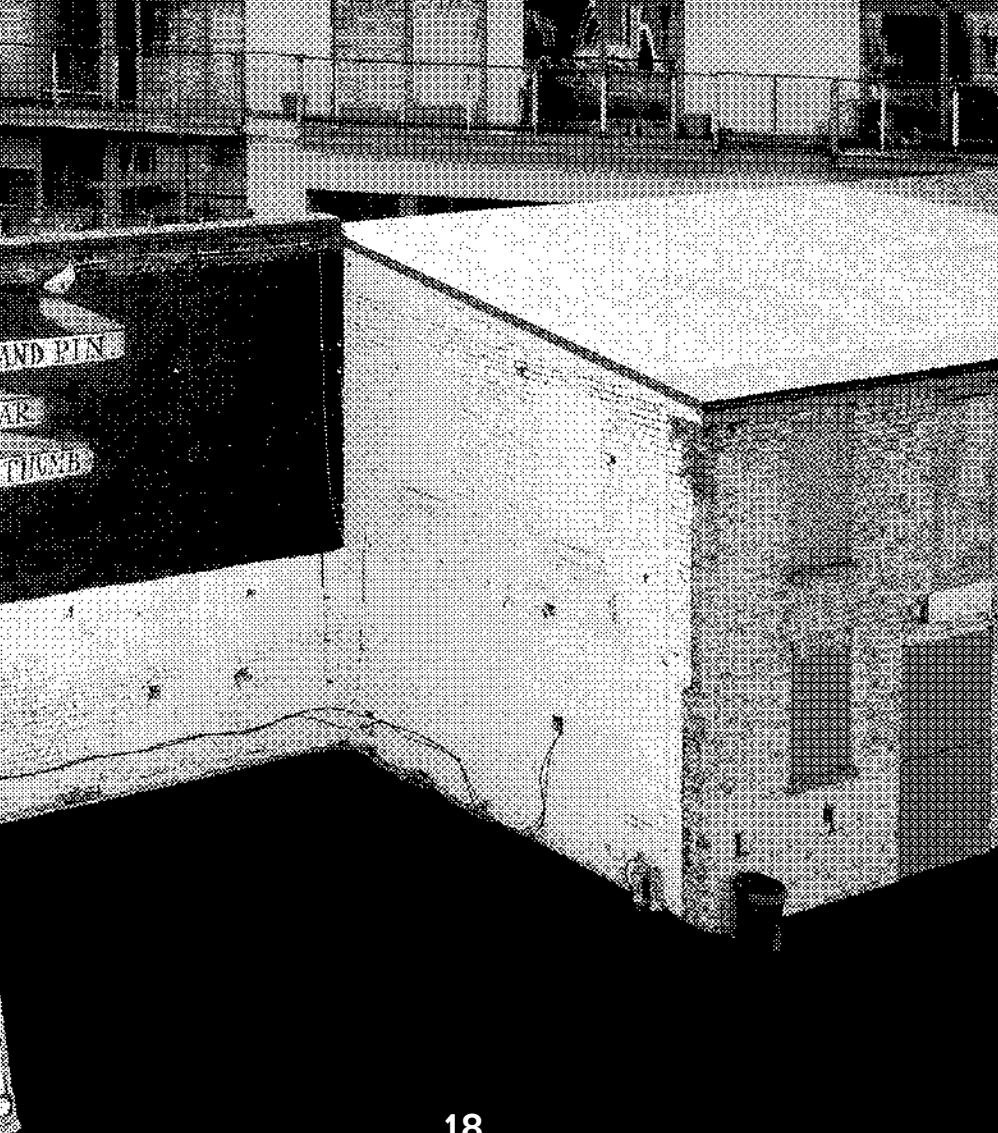
PEARS

EIDER HARE

CASH

WOW

WOW





## Floating

The Cabac is a multi purpose electric vehicle commonly known as a milk float. It was produced by the Smiths Electric Vehicles in the 1950s and 1960s for the doorstep delivery of milk and other dairy products. Its near-silent engines were ideal for early morning deliveries.

The Cabac used for R-Urban Wick was repurposed for the first Folkestone Triennial in 2008 where it was part of public works' contribution entitled 'Folkeconomy.'<sup>1</sup> It was in use for 100 days, after which it stood lonely in a big shed by the seaside. In 2012 the Cabac was renamed Wick On Wheels (WOW) and started roaming (and standing) in Hackney Wick. Little is known about its previous life as a milk float.

1 Folkestone Triennial 2008, see  
<[www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk](http://www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk)>



2 September 2013

## The Wick On Wheels

**Milk floats are subversive vehicles. In many people they evoke nostalgia and the warm and kind taste of childhood memories. Everyone seems to accept their slowness, even when they cause traffic jams.**

**Milk floats are relatively cheap to purchase and made of a simple and sturdy steel frame. They are tax and MOT exempt, which means that they can be easily modified. In Central London you don't have to pay congestion charge and you can re-charge them for free at citywide charging stations. Milk floats offer an unexpected freedom to occupy the city.**



2 December 2012

### Comfrey walk

Since 2012, the Wick On Wheels (WOW) milk float served as a mobile venue to host an itinerant programme of events, workshops, walks and exhibitions. Facilitating events in-situ, or as close as possible to the topics of discussion, sometimes hosting month-long residencies, sometimes acting as a stage for an afternoon event.

For each event, the temporary use of the land had to be negotiated with local authorities or property owners and managers. In most cases you can't just park up but need to ask for permission. Events needed to be planned in advance, risk assessments needed to be filled out, funders and commissioners needed to approve the press release copy, public relations departments needed enough time to tweak the content to suit their relevant narratives.



14 March 2013

### Cr8 Lifestyle Centre

'Can we park our milk float in your car park?... for three months, or longer?... do you have electricity for our drill?'  
'You must be very patient,' replied the fox. 'First you will sit down at a little distance from me—like that—in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day...'<sup>3</sup>

3 de Saint-Exupéry, A. (1943) *The Little Prince*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics.

4 Local artist and Hackney Wick resident at a Cultural Interest Group meeting in Hackney Wick.



23 November 2012

## Frontside Gardens

Part of the LLDC's master plan is to build new routes across Hackney Wick to connect it with Stratford to the east and Hackney Central to the west. But not everyone agrees. 'We don't want access. Access means that rents go up and we are pushed out.'<sup>4</sup>

Frontside Gardens is surrounded by a 2.4 meter-high hoarding. You can see the temporary skate park from the elevated platform of Hackney Wick overground station, but when walking past it you won't notice what's inside. To access the site with the milk float we created a new gate in the hoarding. At the time we assumed easy access would be desirable. Only later did we understand that such openness was not necessarily welcomed. The skate park users like to be by themselves. A skate park is for riding ramps. Much of the rationale behind temporary uses is to activate a site and show that activity is taking place to increase its economic value. Remaining concealed is counter to this.



17 March 2013

## Roaming workshop

The milk float became an impromptu construction workshop, parked for several hours on a double yellow line outside Hackney Wick station. Passers-by joined in on the street and on the pavement. A parking warden was so intrigued by the activity that she pretended not to be able to find the number plate. In 2013 Hackney Wick was still a place in which disruptions of this sort could be accommodated, overlooked and enjoyed for what they are. A freedom that is not common to parts of London where regulations are enforced much more stringently.



29 April 2013

### Float at New Spitalfields Market

You can drive into the market without a problem. If you want access to the waste area you might want to put on a fluorescent jacket which makes you look official.

Tom Fletcher used the float to harvest surplus food from New Spitalfields market to make fresh juice.<sup>5</sup> New Spitalfields Market is the largest food distribution centre in London and one of the largest horticultural markets in the UK. It has a substantial surplus of perfectly edible food that is being discarded on a regular basis.

Once the food crosses the invisible line into the waste area, it transforms from surplus to waste and can't be used anymore as a different legislation applies to waste. It's OK to park, but what is really needed is cold storage to harvest the surplus food on a regular basis and store it on site before it crosses that magical line.

5 Rejuce <[www.rejuce.co.uk](http://www.rejuce.co.uk)>



30 April 2013

## Swan Wharf

The place was empty and seemingly forgotten. Tommy and Isaac were in the far corner fitting out a café with found materials. Two men alone in a big empty building full of promises. Most mobile projects stand still probably for 99% of the time, waiting to be used. Why not flip it around and create a place that can be active while waiting and can be moved when needed? The courtyard was empty, secured by a big gate, a perfect place for 'active waiting.'

Tommy and Isaac's restaurant never happened. WOW was parked in the yard of Swan Wharf for over a year, along with many other cars – just waiting.



11 May 2013

## Surplus digestion

**'The horses might get scared by the milk float' was the most creative excuse to deny us parking up for a short event. Most of the time it's Health and Safety that seems to determine where you can park to host a public event. Usually this 'safe' place is where no other activity takes place, away from those that you want to invite to join in.**

**On this occasion, a simple phone call and it was agreed. Rarely had anyone given permission so quickly to use their land: the forecourt of Central Books. A marquee was erected, a shed on wheels arrived and the milk float parked up alongside. In the last moments of the event we moved onto the street to catch the last bit of sunshine on a very cold day. There is something liberating and empowering about the unmediated and direct access and use of land, about trust and support as opposed to regulations and procedures.**



30 April 2013

## Albion Kids Show

Moving 'things' requires a special knowledge and a hands-on attitude. Often heavy and cumbersome, specialist vehicles are not necessarily user-friendly like cars which are used on a daily basis. Moving mobile projects costs time and effort and needs dedication.

In the early stages of the project, WOW was parked in the workshops of the Albion Kids Show,<sup>6</sup> a charity set up in 1984 to provide mobile adventure playgrounds in social housing estates of Hackney which did not have play facilities. The magical yard lies in a seemingly forgotten corner of Hackney Wick and has become an unofficial centre for mobile projects. Whereas in other places your truck might be considered a nuisance, at the Albion Kids Show you will find special affection for mobile structures and unusual vehicles and the belief that temporary occupations can be a solution and make a difference.

6 Albion Kids Show  
<[www.albionkidsshows.org.uk](http://www.albionkidsshows.org.uk)>



27 July 2013

## Surplus Shop


On 27 July 2013 the Northern part of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park opened to the public: a brand-new landscape for London. The gates opened and a wall of visitors rushed into the park and straight at the float. Stocked with surplus produce from Hackney Wick, such as juice made from food waste or 'horse snacks' made from spent grain used by the local breweries, we were swept up in the spectacle.

We were on the piece of land on which the Hackney Wick Market once had its home, before the Olympics arrived. A local Sunday market where you could buy everything and anything, legal or illegal. Now a grassy plot, a development 'platform', a festival and 40,000 visitors from far and wide. Something has changed.



19





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20

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Through the celebration of temporary, makeshift urban projects, the Temporary City emerges as a blueprint for urban transformation and place making: low-cost, exciting, social and creative. It is a city built on short-term encounters, on networks of workers, visitors and citizens that can be mobilised on demand. And what better model for creative, temporary and spectacular comings-together, than the world of festivals, event production and event management? Festivals and their networks have long intersected with temporary urbanism, in London and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> In Hackney Wick and Fish Island, festivals and event management are at the origins of Swan Wharf, and at the core of their model of temporary occupancy. As explained in June 2014 by P, the project manager, the whole project started with a chance encounter through the Lea Navigation:

P Getting here was quite an easy story, but it was very accidental. The two boats on the pontoon there belong to [two] friends, one is the director of [a] production company. Mostly festivals: they design and build stages, they do brand activation and so on. In winter most of their time is spent on product launches, PR events, Christmas parties... parties, like the Red Bull parties... Google parties... things like that. [...] They also have a talent agency as well, for actors or performers who would be appropriate for events. They were looking for a place to moor, and they moored up [here] and met the landlord and that was how the introduction was made.

1 Recent examples in London cannot fail to include the unfortunate 'Meanwhile London' competition, in 2011, where one of the winning projects was a Pleasure Garden in Canning Town, marketed as a five-year-long festival (sadly, the festival closed soon after opening).

AL How did it evolve? Who were the key people who started coming here, who were you connected to?

- P A lot of that was through the festival network because it makes sense, that is who we know. It's actually a very small industry. Some people who work in festival, work across all kinds of festivals, but mostly music festivals, that's the main industry. It's a multi-billion pound industry, it's kind of underrated, really... but it's actually very risky as well. Much about festivals, especially if you run the production of festivals, is, well, the term is production, but it's essentially building it, to build a festival. It is a uniquely talented industry because you have five days to essentially build a small town, and sometime you have a build crew of a few hundred people, really not very many at all. That means that we have a very strong network of capable metalworkers and scaffolders, general jobsbodies, very competent. But also ticketed and insured,<sup>2</sup> and almost always freelance. Which is great. Such a benefit not to have to employ somebody! [...] So we know a lot of these people and we brought a lot of people into the space.

Although the shift from long-term stable to short-term and casualised work has affected many and diverse productive economies, the digital and creative sectors in particular have become increasingly reliant upon flexible freelance labour. The logic is to have on-demand workers without the need for securing their employment longer-term. The festival's on-demand availability reproduces, on a smaller and ad-hoc scale, the labour availability demanded by large corporate firms and institutions through the work of temporary agencies and other intermediaries.

As explained by the project manager, the ideal worker for a temporary use project is the freelancer who takes upon him/herself the financial and physical risks connected with the activities of the space. While the type of relationships established tends to be fluid and short-term, on the flip-side of this apparent fluidity lie very strict demands in terms of ticketing, insurance and licensing. Here is where professional intermediaries from the festival and event production sectors, come to play a crucial

2 In festival production jargon 'ticketed' means that a worker is licensed to borrow and operate specialist equipment and machinery such as telehandlers, scissorlifts cherrypickers, or to work from a height.

3 See Greenberg, M. (2008) *Branding New York: how a city in crisis was sold to the world*. London: Routledge.

role. Alongside being able to access insured freelancers at short notice and for the short-term, professional temporary use intermediaries are also in a position to draw on their networks to gain access to services such as lawyers and planning consultants who can, for example, help them negotiate and draw up licensing agreements.

Beyond the question of labour and its remuneration, at the origin Swan Wharf was operated through a combination of gift, in-kind and favour economies alongside more conventional monetary exchanges. For instance, a welder negotiated to undertake all the metal work needed on site in return for a discounted rent to use the warehouse as a workshop; Performance Space offered publicity and visibility through their events in exchange for lower rent and flexible use of one of the (then empty) floors as rehearsal and performance venue; public works designed furniture for the yard and the café in exchange for free access to the courtyard parking for their milk float. At the same time, the fluid and loose nature of these agreements makes them precarious and, as in the case of PS, susceptible to rapid withdrawal and adjustment as situations and priorities change.

If networks of production are crucial, temporary projects also need networks of users available at short notice to use and fill the space and make it financially sustainable. This model functions well in sites of monopoly rent, such as metropolitan areas, where space is limited and expensive and demand is high. In addition, the 'cool' and 'edgy' factor of a core and shell warehouse can be drawn upon as a backdrop for the production of urban lifestyle imaginaries through film, magazines and fashion photography.<sup>3</sup>

AL So, how did you fill the space? Did you rent it out short term?

P One thing that we agreed on all together was that we wouldn't invest any money into this building, and that everything you see, building the restaurant, the workshops and the studios, the revenue would all be generated from the space. Our first focus for the first few months was to rent it out to short-term projects, things like film or photography. They tend to have



7 May 2014

quite big budgets, they are not very creative things to get involved with, they don't really care much for, you know, there is no way to get involved in them at all, they have a brief, they come in, they produce their film and they leave. But they do have big budgets and the first few shoots provided us enough money to build the studios and have them signed off by building rates.

**MF** And whose network did these users come from?

**P** They came from networks that already existed, like location agencies. [...] you call them, and you get on their books. [...] we didn't know many people at first [...] now we exchange bookings with Space, the White Building, and Stour space, so if we get a booking to have a wedding in our event space for only fifty people, we send them to Stour space. If Stour Space gets a viewing for a 200 guest wedding they send them straight to us... we do a lot of exchanges like this, which work really well because, well, it just happens that we get a lot of bookings from each other.



4 June 2014

Beside regular users, temporary projects also need networks of consumers able to recognize and value their aesthetic, social and entertaining value. Commentators have written of a specific 'economy of attention' of temporary use: the need for continued activation of spaces through events in order to establish them not only as places of production but also as destinations for visitors and cultural tourists.<sup>4</sup> The 'small town' built by festival production workers in Swan Wharf involved the transformation of the courtyard from a parking and storage area to a viewing platform and outdoor restaurant, later to become a location of Hackney WickEd festival. But networks are also a highly valued product of temporary urban uses. With the 'activation' of vacant spaces through use, what is also activated are the networks themselves. In other words, networks are one of the products of temporary use, if not the main one. As explained by an LLDC officer in July 2014, with regards to their interim uses strategy:

We are really keen on opportunities for things like studios for start-ups and entrepreneurs, and

places, creating spaces for people to try things out, essentially, so that eventually a fledgling business could then be nurtured into something which is more established [...] that is not going to happen for everything, but it would be really great if we could use these empty sites for a positive benefit.

The start-up model relies on the probability that the business (as the project, as the space) might fail; yet the model itself mobilises and produces professional networks that might be re-employed at a later stage. From the standpoint of value processes, temporary spaces become sites of experimentation for institutions (for instance Fish Island Labs being described by a local digital freelancer as 'a low risk gateway' for the Barbican) as well as for entire sectors, with research and development externalised to short-term 'incubator spaces.'

In this celebration of networks as a positive benefit in and of itself, what remains unspoken is how highly mobile and fast-paced networks are generating new forms of exclusionary social capital that exacerbate, rather than address, existing inequalities.<sup>5</sup> By celebrating temporary uses as inherently symptomatic of networked urban cultures (networks of production, use and consumption), we lose sight of alternative non-professionalised and non-entrepreneurial value processes based on wanting to take activities out of capitalist market dynamics, with the desire or hope to disrupt them. Beyond the conditions of networked organizing, the association between festivals and pop-up and temporary urban spaces also points to other values, potentially at odds with the imaginaries promoted through the nearby redevelopments:

- I think that the whole rise in pop-ups and temporary uses and what have you has been massively fuelled by festival culture. Festivals are the perfect environment for people to go and try out a new idea. And if it works maybe they'll do it again... I think Hackney Wick has very much a festival feel, is an all-year-round festival atmosphere in here. You get people who want to get off their face and listen to music, and you get people who are really engaged, interested and excited about what they are doing. [...] I think the city

needs a place, a space for people to do that. I think, politically that is very difficult because they want the Olympic Park to be a green and wholesome land of... you know, clean, drug-free athletics, and all the rest of that, and having Hackney Wick on the door steps probably doesn't sit very well with that.

- AL But it's also the disturbance element, people who want to take things out of the market and have their own alternative way, their alternative city...
- O I think festivals are probably the only long-term space where that can happen. Low-cost, temporary, pop-up...

Contrary to O's beliefs, we think that it is important not to accept uncritically that sense of romantic nostalgia for festivals as 'time outside time', as alternative spaces autonomous from mainstream social and economic activities, as universes in themselves.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, through temporary projects, the model of the festival and event-production is becoming increasingly central to urban development and it is particularly appealing to policy makers, planners and property owners who have understood the value of urban experiential economies. Temporary uses, like festivals, are popular, require minimal support or infrastructure, and most importantly, come with an expiry date.

Yet, beneath the overwhelming celebration of a temporary festival city of never-ending connectivity, of pop-up hubs, of creative professionals cynically and calculatedly going along and clinging to the hope that the rising tide will take them up with it, are practitioners, architects, artists and local community groups trying to inhabit the practice of temporary urbanism with different values and aims. In contrast to a never-ending festival of short-term connectivity, transient freelance work and temporariness bought through sweat equity from the long-term logics of urban development and real estate investment, they engage with the space opened up by 'the temporary city' to interrogate,

- 4 Oswalt, P., Overmeyer, K. and P. Misselwitz (2013) *Urban Catalyst: The Power of Temporary Use*, Berlin: DOM Publishers.
- 5 Blokland, T. and M. Savage (eds.) (2008) *Networked Urbanism: Social Capital in the City*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- 6 Giorgi, L., Sassatelli, M., and Delanty, G. (eds.) (2011) *Festivals and the cultural public sphere*. London: Routledge.

contest and disrupt business as usual. While multiple values coexist within a single stance, and at times even within the work of single individuals, it is in practice that competing values become visible and can be debated and acted up. In practice, individuals and groups meet, their interests and positions shifting or strengthening, in response to and themselves shaping different situations. It is here, in the multiple practices that constitute this emerging Temporary City, that processes of recuperation become visible in small details as much as in the wider temporal and economic governance frameworks. But it is also here where critique becomes embodied and where different, more socially and environmentally just forms of urban living, are articulated and given substance.









22



23

DREAM

DREAM



LAND



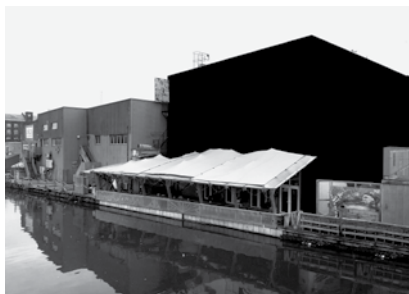
TYND







- 1 **Wooden platform (2011–ongoing).** Remnant of architecture collective Assemble's Folly for a Flyover, a nine-week-long temporary cinema and café built under the concrete bridges of the eastbound and westbound A12, along the River Lee Navigation Canal (summer 2011).



- 2 **90 Main Yard, 90 Wallis Road, London E9 (2013–ongoing).** Formerly a venue known for rave parties, in 2013 the building was converted into an open plan hot-desking office and workshop space for freelancers, designers and artists, and a canal side café, bar and restaurant, on a five-year lease. In 2014, it was rumoured that the building might be demolished to make space for a wider bridge across the canal.



- 3 **Canal boat, River Lee Navigation Canal, view from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.** More and more Londoners are opting to live on boats to avoid soaring rents and house prices in the capital. In the past five years temporary moorings have multiplied in Hackney Wick and Fish Island.



- 4 **Pedestrian and cycle bridge, eastern end of Wallis Road, E9 (2013–ongoing).** Developed as part of the London 2012 redevelopment of the area and opened to the public in 2013. It is feared locally that the construction of the East Wick neighbourhood across the canal will lead to the enlargement of the bridge to accommodate vehicle crossing.



- 5 Fence, Loop Road, E20. It surrounds the plot of land allocated to the Sweetwater development. In 2014, part of the fence became a canvas for Jo Peel's commissioned artwork *Meet Me In The City*.



- 6 Hub67, 67 Rothbury Road, view from Wallis Road, E9 (2014–ongoing). Temporary community centre in repurposed containers. Initially to be built as a two-year facility, the current expiry date remains unknown.



- 7 Hub67, 67 Rothbury Road, view from the Hackney Wick Overground bridge (2014–ongoing).



- 8 The White building, Queen's Yard, E9 (2012–ongoing). The building contains five artist studios, a bookable event space, a large residency studio and a pizzeria. The project was initiated by the LLDC who commissioned the refurbishment. The current lease and subsidised rental agreement is set to expire in January 2017.



- 9 Here East, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, E20. Formerly the Press and Broadcast Centre of the London 2012 Olympic Games, then rebranded as iCity. Under construction.



- 10 Cygnet restaurant's makeshift wooden platform, Swan Wharf, 60 Dace Road, E3 (summer 2014–ongoing). Currently in use by the restaurant's successor, a 'pop-up bistro' called The Plough.



- 11 The Yard Theatre, Unit 2A Queen's Yard, E9 (2011–ongoing). Born as a 'pop-up' experimental venue and internally built as a temporary makeshift theatre, it is a performance space, bar and restaurant.



- 12 Billboard with the graffiti 'IPSL+++ ArtEvict', White Post Lane, E9 (2010). Ephemeral trace of the performance art scene in Hackney Wick.



- 13 'Hackney Wick' sign, Prince Edward Road, E9 (2010–ongoing). Originally made of cardboard, it was redone in steel by muf architecture/art and J+L Gibbons as part of the commissioned *Street Interrupted* (2010) public realm improvements.



- 14 Swan Wharf, 60 Dace Road, E3 (2013–ongoing). The waterfront part of the warehouse hosts short-let working spaces and an event space for hire. A full planning application to partially demolish and redevelop the building into residential and commercial units is currently pending approval.



- 15 Arbeit Project, Unit 4, White Post Lane / Queen's Yard, E9 (2013–ongoing). Studios rented to artists, designers, fashion designers, computer programmers, small businesses and agencies. The building is likely to be demolished with the redevelopment of Queen's Yard.



- 16 Lord Napier public house, White Post Lane, E9 (c.1865–ongoing) The pub on the corner of the road has existed since the early 20th Century. Closed in the mid-1990s, the vacant site became a squat and a reclaimed music venue. Currently empty, proposals were made in 2011 to demolish it and build an apartment block. In 2014 it was included in the LLDC's Fish Island & White Post Lane Conservation Area.



- 17 Swan Wharf, 60 Dace Road, E3, view from across the Old Ford Lock.



- 18 Swan Wharf yard. Since the opening of Swan Wharf, the courtyard has been used as an outdoor workshop, a storage space and a parking lot. The Wick On Wheels milk float was parked here (2013–ongoing). Current plans for the redevelopment would retain part of the yard alongside new residential development.



- 19 Frontside Gardens skate park, White Post Lane, E9 (2012–ongoing). Volunteer-run skate park on a vacant plot of land. Originally commissioned as a three-month project during the London 2012 Games, it remains a precarious youth facility.



- 20 Fish Island Riviera, Stour Road, E3 (2012–ongoing). Created in summer 2012, transplanted sand and palm trees remain on site. During summer 2014 it was the (Fish Island) venue of the Hackney WickEd festival.



- 21 Vacant land, White Post Lane, E9. Mostly used as a car park and deposit, in summer 2015 it was the site of the Kopparberg Urban Forest festival. Set to be redeveloped as part of the Hackney Wick Hub.



- 22 Wallis Yard, Wallis Road, E9. Currently in private and public (LLDC) ownership, the yard sits within the 'Opportunity site 1' of the Hackney Wick Hub. In 2012, it was temporarily used for the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Art Camp by muf architecture/art. Over the years, low-rise light industrial buildings have hosted affordable studios for more than 200 artists. According to plans approved in 2015, many will be demolished and redeveloped into residential, commercial and creative work spaces.



- 23 Vacant building, Roach Road, E3, view from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Formerly the site of the first café in Fish Island, Countercafé (now at Stour Space); for fourteen months it was home to Muff Customs Café and motorcycle workshop.

# Colophon

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